CHRISTIAN COMPANIONSHIP

For Retired Hours.

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Christian companionship for retired hours

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For Retired Hours

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
I. CHRISTIAN INTIMACY,	1
II. FORMALITY AND SIMPLICITY,	19
III. STEPS TOWARDS LOVE,	35
IV. LOST AND SAVED,	55
V. THE WITHERED AND THE FRESH,	71
VI. A TRIAL OF FAITH,	89
VII. SEPARATION,	111
VIII. BROKEN CHAINS,	129
IX. STAGES IN CONVERSION,	151
X. THE HOUSE OF MERCY,	171
XI. CHRIST IN THE FAMILY,	189
XII. THE PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE OF THE CROSS,	209

CHRISTIAN COMPANIONSHIP

I.

CHRISTIAN INTIMACY.

LUKE x. 38–42.

"It came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman, named Martha, received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

I.

HE evangelist in our motto throws open a home to our view. We have before us two sisters who both of them knew the Lord, who loved Him and served Him too, each in her own fashion. On the other hand, it is said of Jesus Christ that He "loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." This house at Bethany was one of the favourite resorts of the Saviour; it was thither He retired when He desired a brief season of repose, and to escape from the "multitude that thronged and pressed Him." For Jesus Christ, a man like unto ourselves, required, as we do, intimate relations with other men. Amongst His disciples there were three with whom He was pre-eminently intimate—namely, Peter, James, and John. It was with them that He ascended Mount Tabor; it was they who were permitted to approach nearest during the anguish at Gethsemane; and of these three it was John more especially who was known as the "disciple

whom Jesus loved." The Saviour seemed to have closer sympathies with him, and this home circle at Bethany was the one of all others of which He oftenest deigned to make a part. There are different degrees of closeness in Christian communion; and even if we know a large number of pious families, there will ever be some among them that we peculiarly delight to return to, feeling that we are more fully understood there. But, after all, a true intimacy is a very rare thing. There are certain Christian individualities that do not suit ours; others, again, may meet our taste far more; but the truth is, that there are a very small number indeed that entirely harmonise with our preferences. The passage brings before us two sisters, united on the one true foundation; yet for all that, between these two sisters there does not exist a perfect spiritual communion. Martha is not thoroughly at her ease with Mary, Mary's character is not the same as Martha's, although this does not prevent them both knowing and loving the Lord. But still, we must admit, there are characters more or less favourable to intimacy: you may spend years with this or that Christian and never advance a step nearer to him, and this because there exists either in him or

you some unremoved barrier. Sometimes this barrier consists in outward circumstance, but most frequently the obstacle arises from certain defects of character on one side or the other. We would meditate further on this matter; and in order to this, let us examine more narrowly the spiritual condition of Martha and that of Mary. We see at once that Mary is better fitted for intimacy than Martha; the latter has excellent qualities indeed, but in Mary there is a higher element, which her sister lacks. The Lord himself prefers Mary. He declares this fact plainly when He says, "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things. But one thing is needful; and Mary has chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

This family picture may be looked at from many different points of view, but we shall best adapt it to our particular purpose, by inquiring what it is that prevents Christian intimacy, and what are the conditions essential thereto?

There is a certain restlessness and agitation in the character of Martha. She lacks true calm; and, in order to realise a perfect intimacy. there must be

fewer external anxieties, and a greater fund of spiritual experience. Now, what is wanting in many Christians is just that spiritual element, gained from greater nearness to the Lord. Martha does not know Jesus well enough, and she is not sufficiently anxious to know Him better; she does not remain in silent meditation at His feet; there is too great a variety of objects that influence her. When the soul is not thoroughly given to the Lord, Christian relations will invariably have about them something more or less cold and superficial. The interchange of experience soon becomes exhausted, and conversation often degenerates into mere chit-chat. One must experimentally know the love of Christ for sinners, in order to have the tenderness of heart that intimacy demands. The word of the Lord must have penetrated in many ways and from many sides into the soul, if we are to have spiritual influence, and to be capable of intimate spiritual love. Now, it was not thus that Martha had begun. She threw herself too soon into activity, and we are not to be governed by an activity, but to govern it; which is impossible, unless the Lord has first of all conquered and taken possession of the citadel of the soul. If we draw not near

to Him more intimately, we will fall into formalism before we are aware of it. Our thoughts will wander; where our treasure is, our heart will not be; and should any shock come, we will be like a tottering wall and a broken fence. Much power of concentration is needed to be calm and firm in the midst of that multiplicity of cares and vexations which each day brings with it. The lamp is not nourished by the flame; it is nourished by oil which has constantly to be renewed; and thus it is communion of the soul with its God which gives faith and perseverance in trying circumstances. It is this intimate nearness to the Lord which fits us for Christian intimacy, and will cause it to grow and mature. There is indeed a certain amenity of character, a natural affectionateness, an easy address, an insinuating manner, and other qualities of the kind, which seem sufficient to make the friendship of two individuals so endowed an intimate friendship. But "the Lord will not give His glory to another." None of these qualities can stand in lieu of the eternal Source of love. Such or such a trying situation will arise, and you will see all intimacy that is not the work of God languish, decline, and die. Human life

changes and glides away rapidly, and, in order that our Christian friendships should have the character of permanence, we must not only know the Lord, but follow on to know Him.

There is another obstacle that checks intimacy, and that is self-love. How many Christians do we see to whom we dare make no personal observation, who take offence at whatever one says! Their great enemy is this susceptibility. Self-righteousness has an infinite variety of ramifications; but we may always discover its presence by a secret dissatisfaction felt whenever any one touches our conscience, and does not thoroughly approve us. Why is it that there are certain Christians with whom we have no wish to become more intimate? Because, on some occasion or other they have happened to tell us a home truth which we cannot forget. The Lord makes an observation of this kind to Martha; He is not perfectly satisfied with her Christianity. It is true, we know not how Martha received the rebuke; but one thing is certain, you will never have a really intimate friend so long as you cannot accept humiliation. It is a difficult thing, no doubt, to do

so, more especially if our good, our best intentions appear to be misconstrued. Martha believes that she is labouring for the Lord, and instead of praising, her Lord blames her! This is by no means an uncommon case. We are occupied in Christian undertakings; perhaps we excite nothing but discontent. We are not aware that these undertakings, praiseworthy in themselves, may but be a disguise for self-seeking and self-importance on our part. We have not probed our own heart sufficiently to know it, and if some one reveals the truth to us, we are at once offended. Take two Christian friends, who hold pre-eminently to their own personal dignity and worth: there will be a hopeless divergency between them — there will never be a genuine union. The Bible tells them: "Let the same mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus." He pleased not Himself; He humbled Himself. Let us consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, and who has declared to us that "whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it." The domain of humility is also the domain of love and Christian intimacy. We will pass safely over

many occasions of stumbling and offence, when we have learnt to forget self and to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" in the persons of our brethren.

But there is still another obstacle to the affectionate intimacy we treat of, and it is the little taste that we have for the word of the Lord. While Jesus Christ is speaking to Mary, Martha does not listen, but is "careful and troubled about many things." We do not say that Martha's anxieties and distractions were worldly ones; but Christian distractions are distractions still. The heart, though given to God, is still so full of many things! How do we employ the moments when the Lord speaks to us, when His word lies open before us, and ought to pierce to the dividing of the joints and marrow? What wandering thoughts! what heaviness of ears and heart! how little sometimes remains of a chapter when we read it in the morning and try at evening to recall the use we have made of it during the day. "When I called," says the Lord, "there was none that answered." Can "a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? yet my people hath forgotten me days without number." This spiritual torpor has sadder

consequences than we suppose. With a heart so lethargic and dull, how can we throw ourselves into the situation of others? Yet this sympathy is an essential condition of intimacy. Unmoved and indifferent when the word of the Lord is searching our spirit, will we be less so when a Christian friend seeks to pour out his heart to us? When divine interests are comparatively little valued, human interests will be still less so; intimate relations become a burden, a trouble, when the Scriptures have not their free course and do not direct the life. Let us be careful indeed, but careful to hear the Lord, for the unction that causes to know all things flows from the lips of Jesus. Let us not be troubled about many things before we have secured the one thing needful. The word of God brings this one thing to our remembrance: "Thy testimonies," says the Psalmist, "are my delights and my counsellors."

These are some of the hindrances to Christian intimacy; but what are the conditions most favourable to it? Were we to examine the spiritual state of Mary as we have attempted to do that of Martha, we should find that Mary is one who

has prayed much, loved much, and suffered much. If we see two Christians who meet upon the common ground of this threefold experience, we may conclude that they will be intimate friends; they have all the qualifications for becoming so.

We said that Mary's was a soul that prayed much.

Prayer expands the soul and develops spirituality. To pray much implies something higher than reflecting much or learning much. Mary is a woman of prayer, and true light comes from God.

To outward appearance, perhaps, Mary may do little; but those who understand her feel that she does much, that she does more than Martha. Let us not confound the passive attitude of Mary with the inaction of a merely contemplative life. Does a soul that turns to the Lord to receive of His fulness, grace for grace, do nothing, then? Must we always be using hands or feet before we can say we act? Prayer is action, perhaps the most important of all action. It is prayer that directs life, watches our movements, discovers to us our enemies, repairs our breaches, strengthens the things that were ready to die. Such is the activity of Mary—such

is the first condition of true intimacy. We see that Mary carries on this sacred work beneath her own roof; that she is there during the hours when Jesus Christ himself deigns to speak to her. She does not throw off her temporal duties. She remains in the world, because she wishes to be as leaven in that world. But it is at the feet of Jesus that she seeks for the instruction of wisdom; and without Him she can do nothing; and she feels the need to keep reminding Him of this.

Mary's stationary attitude at her Lord's feet typifies that spiritual persistency which holds Him fast till He has heard and granted our petition. The Scripture bids us "sanctify the Lord God in our hearts." This is what Mary does, and she will reap the benefit of it for herself and for others. Give her some work to do on the morrow—from the success of all that she undertakes you will see that she has prayed. Bring her into contact with an unamiable character—she will have bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering. Introduce her into a Christian family—she will soon have intimate relations with its members. A life of prayer is a magnet which attracts the most rebellious; they are constrained

to say to themselves: "If God be for him, who can be against him?"

But Mary's is a soul which loves much. This is the second condition essential to true intimacy. What is it to love? It might be defined as the knowing how to give ourselves away. Love is self-sacrifice, and hence the love of Jesus is the model love. He laid down His life for us; everything is comprehended in this; and those who have overcome by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of His testimony, are those who have not counted their lives dear unto themselves. At first sight, love seems the most natural of all things: is not love the life of God—of that God who is love? But when we ourselves try to love, we meet with "gates of brass and bars of iron." The self-surrender, self-renunciation requisite offend us. Let us kill our own selfishness; it is only at that price that we will be able to love. There are two kinds of selfishness—the one coarse, the other refined. When we have crucified the first, we may still have to contend with the second. It is this selfishness that conceals itself in our natural affections. We love, but on condition that

we are loved in return. We go to see a sick person, but this sick person must be interesting. We are willing to rise at midnight to open to a friend, but this is in order that he may let us sleep in peace afterwards. We forgive seven times, that we may have the right to say, Is not that enough? The Pharisees did as much, but at the feet of Jesus we learn other lessons. Mary is learning there that charity "which faileth not, which beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." Nothing short of this will suffice for true intimacy. Alas, how much misery is there in those private relations which are only superficially Christian! The fact is, there is as yet no real love—only the desire to be loved. Mary, on the contrary, desires to receive from the Lord that gift of perfect love which seeks no other wages than to go on loving more and more.

But Mary had suffered much. Suffering is the complement of faith. "Unto you it is given," says St Paul to the Philippians, "in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake." Suffering renders the heart soft and tender, and takes away all its natural

haughtiness. From a first conversation one can easily discover whether a person is acquainted with suffering, whether the spirit has undergone that divine husbandry. Deep sympathy must spring from that intense pity which throbs in a heart taught of God. The more we have ourselves felt His chastening hand, the more ready are we to stretch out our hand to those who are also in the furnace of affliction. There is a blessing even in external sufferings. A man who has had losses, trials, is more approachable, more open to serious impressions, more ripe for intimate relations with his brother man. But sufferings from without are not sufficient; the most salutary of all are those that spring from within. It is the common experience of sin and deliverance that most cements Christian intimacy. Bring two broken and contrite hearts together, two sinners who thoroughly know themselves, and have sounded their own nature to its depths, and there will be there an intimacy the most solid and abiding of all. There is a communion of spiritual poverty; there will be also a communion of love and of prayer. Martha will be thoroughly at home with Mary, and Mary will no longer hold back anything from Martha.

Each will show himself as he is, for there is no longer any fond illusion of self-love to be spared; each will esteem others better than himself. If such intimacy is rare, it is because a deep sense of sin is rare also. We speak of it indeed, but we have not experienced it, or else we have left the crucible of the Holy Spirit before our dross was thoroughly purged away.

And now pass in review our circle of Christian acquaintance. Have we a single friend? Do we ourselves deserve to be called by so high a name? There are places where one finds indeed many Christian families; we meet, we pray together, we join in divers undertakings; but for all that, soul does not draw near to soul. The second evening is like the first, the third like the second; the heart makes no progress towards warmer and fuller sympathy. Oh! why should not Christians try to become more to each other? Our life is so short, and true intimacy is so blessed a thing! We feel the need of it, and yet we do not attain thereto. But the hindrances are, as we cannot too often repeat to ourselves, that we have not as yet prayed enough, loved enough, suffered enough.

If we grow in all these particulars, we will have happier relations; we will find fresh treasures in our Christian friendships; our communications will be more direct, more varied, more intimate; in that interchange of life and experience, each will enrich and be enriched, will gain and give strength; we will discover how far aloof we have hitherto stood, and how the assembly of the saints is also the "edification of the body of Christ." At the best, however, these earthly intimacies must have their defects. This is as it should be. There are feelings which are only for the Lord, transports of love and confidence which can no longer be bestowed on any creature. And when we find ourselves alone once more with Him, even after our happiest hours of human intercourse, we will exclaim afresh, "Who is like unto thee! As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so longeth my soul after God!" "One thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

II.

FORMALITY AND SIMPLICITY.

MARK X. 15.

"Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein."

II.

IN the words of our Lord which we have chosen for meditation there is something that regards children, and something, too, that is intended for adults. Jesus Christ suffers the little children to come unto Him, and thus shows us that even at that early age they have capacity to find the Saviour. Indeed, His saving work has been seen in more than one infantine heart, before it had received any regular instruction from man.

There is much more affinity than we generally imagine between Jesus Christ and a little child, and it is not without reason declared by the Lord that "out of the mouths of babes and sucklings has He ordained strength, because of His enemies." Thus, too, the Saviour presents to us little children as our model, when He solemnly proclaims, "Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein." By this the Lord does not

give us to understand that little children are innocent, or little angels, as we often hear them called by worldly people. The germ of sin already exists in the new-born child; let it live a year or two, and it will soon show all sorts of evil tendencies, which neither proceed from bad education nor bad example, but simply from a fallen nature. It is consoling to reflect that the Saviour passed through early childhood to restore that portion of our life, as He has restored the rest. If He places us in the presence of a little child, it is that we may strive after that simplicity which it possesses. "God made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions." Now, a little child has not yet taken any bent; it is candid, simple, transparent: by and by it will no longer be so. The older we grow, the more heart-sincerity wears off, to be replaced by semblances. Instead of showing ourselves as we really are, we have recourse to a borrowed conventionality. Would we ourselves like all the world to know what is covered by our manners and countenance? Now, between truth and falsehood there is a sort of debateable ground, which may be described as formality. It is to this that we would turn our thoughts. Formality,

as we understand it, is the mere shadow of truth, and it penetrates into many of the tendencies of our heart and our mutual relations. It glides, too, into our religious life; and thus we shall be led to think of natural formality and spiritual formality,—of which last the Bible affords us many illustrations. When we have sufficiently studied this formality in its origin and its manifestations, we will return to contemplate the temper of a little child, repeating to ourselves the Lord's declaration, that unless we receive the kingdom of God as such, we shall not enter therein. And as this passage alludes to a simplicity that must take place of formality, we shall examine what it consists in. We shall find there is a natural simplicity of character, and a simplicity that is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is not to the former, but to the latter, that our Lord promises the entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

Let us go to the root of things; it is in the heart that everything begins. What does this formality amount to in its original condition? It is, in point of fact, a state of resistance, of antagonism, which we will not allow to appear; it is a secret disaffec-

tion and dislike which would be too compromising were it allowed to display itself openly. A formal man is potentially a murderer, for he has within him the germ of hatred, and hatred is murder begun. If God left us to ourselves, we, formal men, should exterminate each other, because the general state of the fallen heart is one of mutual resistance and opposition. But it would be too odious to let this fatal tendency appear in all its nakedness. We therefore conceal it as well as we can; we only leave visible what we cannot succeed in concealing.

Let us come down to details; and for this purpose we will sketch a few portraits, working our way gradually from the circumference to the centre.

There is a social formality, first of all, to which we give the name of etiquette. It is a subjection to conventionalities in which the heart has no share. One would gladly shake off such a bondage, but the spirit of the age is too strong for us. To struggle would but be to encounter the fate of the pot of earth pitted against the pot of iron. It is no longer truth that reigns here below — it is

deceit. All men are liars,—only civilised, polite, fashionable liars. They study their deportment, their gestures, their manners, that they may give to them all a certain degree of grace; but this is not "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ;" it is simply formality.

Then, again, there is a formality in speech. Some men there are who are dry, curt, dictatorial, and who adopt this style only to give themselves a semblance of authority. They are deficient in true seriousness; they neither feel the solemnity of life, nor the importance of divine things. They feel only the weight, the importance of their own personality. But, not content with this, they are anxious that others should feel it too, and hence their grandiloquent air and language.

Then there is a formality in opinion. We find some human characters infallible in their own eyes — impossible to instruct or in any way to convince of error. They are their own oracles, wise in their own conceit to the pitch of folly. One need not attempt to alter them, they are invariably right, the last word is theirs, and they brook no contradiction. They are men who pretend to a monopoly of truth, and confound it with

their own personality, just as Louis XIV. used to say, "France is me."

Again, there is a rigid formality in determination. There are men who will, because they will, without any other reason. It is enough that they have resolved upon anything for it to be done, however wilful and unreasonable no matter, an angel could not change their purpose. And as it is always easy to find a well-sounding name for what we are bent upon excusing, such self-will is characterised as energy, force of character, firmness of resolve.

Such men bring the same unbending formality into all matters of business. We find them inexorable when we have to discuss with them any affair of mutual interest. They are selfish despots, who, availing themselves to the utmost of their legal rights, will despoil us without a scruple. Too often, alas! this spirit exists between brothers and sisters when there is an inheritance to be divided amongst them.

There is another development of the same peculiarity less repulsive, but more general still. It is the formality that encounters us in the everyday affairs of life. There are many men who will wait for ever that others may come forward to meet

them, and who will on no account consent to take the first step. They have too much self-respect, they allege, to throw themselves at the heads of others, they consider true wisdom to consist in waiting to be sought. One might suppose they were demigods, always surrounded by a small halo. Indeed, unless you have a grain or two of incense to offer them, they are always silent and reserved. We are well aware that this species of formality has a very well-sounding name—it passes for self-respect.

Formality may also affect the style and manner, for indeed the style and manner are the man. There are formal letters, formal conversations,—the words, one would say, all move on stilts. A man of this sort, writing to his friend, will weigh every word; for there is a diplomacy in friendly as well as in political correspondence. It is not the heart, it is a spirit of calculation that puts these letters into the post.

We have before said that there is a spiritual as well as a natural formality. The *Ego* which is at the bottom of all formalities enters into our spiritual relations as well. The Bible shows us

many examples of the kind. We think we are drawing the sword for God's honour, while all the time we are exalting our own persons. When the sons of Zebedee would have called fire from heaven upon the Samaritan villages, they were not aware that they were just as much offended with the slight offered to them as to their Master. And when the disciples would have forbidden the man who walked not with them to cast out devils in the name of Jesus, they were actuated by a spirit of clerical bigotry, they had a quite papal pretension in their heart, though they were far from owning it to themselves. Again, when Peter was willing to forgive seven times, and asked if that were enough, there was formality in his Christianity. When St Paul wrote to two Christian women, "I beseech Euodias and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord," he was probably alluding to some degree of formality which had crept into their relations with each other. Spiritual formality may arise from wounded susceptibility, from professional jealousy, clerical pride, want of tact in bearing one's testimony, or perhaps excessive predilection for this or that doctrine of secondary importance, to the prejudice of the vital point, the one foundation.

All these false tendencies spring from stiffness and formality of spirit. Man since his fall is the most stubbornly formal of all creatures, he puts his own personality in the place of God and the Gospels; it is in this spirit he speaks, acts, professes Christianity, till Jesus Christ himself says to him, "Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein."

It is *simplicity*, in short, that we need, and in large measure, but it must be the *true* simplicity. For, as we said before, there is a natural simplicity, as well as the one which is the work of the Spirit. Let us first of all examine the former of these. It may be illustrated under several forms.

There is a simplicity which is mere easy-going, or a want of manners and culture. It consists in making one's self thoroughly at home with all the world, without caring either for their approbation or disapprobation. It is a simplicity which amounts to rudeness; and if one had the choice of the two, one would positively prefer formality. It is not such a condition as this which enters into the kingdom of heaven.

There is another kind of simplicity which is nothing more than dulness of mind, or torpidity of conscience. We find some characters that we can turn and twist at will, and who have neither judgment nor moral development to comprehend life as it is. Such a state as this, beneath a certain appearance of harmlessness, conceals great moral danger. The same man will let himself be used as an instrument for all sorts of purposes which he has never examined, and which may place him on slippery ground, where fall after fall will be inevitable.

There is a third kind of simplicity, which is often admired as a virtue, but which is only an affair of habit or temperament. We often hear it said of a man that he has simple habits, and this is made a merit of in him. In point of fact, the man can indeed dispense with many things, but only because they have never entered into his ideal of a happy life. Or, even admitting that a man accustomed to a more luxurious life should be compelled by some reverse of fortune to limit his expenses, do you suppose that he is in consequence any better fitted for the kingdom of heaven? To become a little child means far more

than an economical system of management, or an adaptation to circumstances.

Finally, there is a simplicity which is only an imitation, which is not the real thing. The man would indeed seem thoroughly simple, but he would seem this just because he is not really so. True simplicity must be spontaneous; there must be no premeditation or design about it. Try to assume a manner that is not your own, to be more free and easy and cordial than nature has made you—the real man will pierce through the assumed character. Christian simplicity is not a matter of study, nor is it like to any other simplicity; it is the fruit of an internal change, and an operation of the Holy Spirit.

Would we contemplate true simplicity — that which gives entrance into the kingdom of heaven? Let us contemplate Jesus Christ — in Him we see the most simple man that ever lived. His heart, His life, are simplicity itself. There all is true, primitive, free from formality. What a little child is as a child, Jesus Christ is as man. The truth of a little child, the grace of a little child, we see them in full measure in the Saviour;

for as "the law came by Moses, so grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." We are touched at seeing the Saviour suffer little children to come to Him, and take them up in His arms, and make them happy there; but the same privileges are offered to us. That which unites with Christ is a holy simplicity. A simple thing is one; let us give this unity to our life by centring all things in Christ, and our formalities will drop off; everything will range itself around the one supreme interest. Those cogitations of self-love, those puerile pretensions, those efforts of pride, those deceptions of self-will, will give place to an innate mildness and serenity, which rest the mind, refresh the heart, and sanctify the life in its details and as a whole. We will attain this new happiness by beginning with prayer. Let us breathe every prayer as on the threshold of eternity; banish all terrestrial interests at these holy seasons, and the world will decrease and Jesus Christ will increase, and this union with the Lord will render us calm, happy, simple as a child. A celestial influence will pervade our soul, our actions, our words. The unction from above will govern our lives, and, while teaching us all things, will com-

municate all things; and thus an "abundant entrance will be ministered to us into the kingdom of heaven." Understood in this sense, we may affirm simplicity to be the sure sign of spiritual growth. The most advanced Christians are also the most simple—those that all the world can get on with, and with whom everybody feels happy. That which is true, which is natural, must ever surpass what is formal and artificial. But, in order to become as a little child, one must pass through the hands of the Lord himself. This process may, indeed, be long and painful, but it is the best, nay, the only profitable one. Formal actions proceed from a formal heart; but, when once the heart is won, "the crooked shall be straight, and the rough places plain." We may say of the *simple*, as of the *meek*, that they shall "inherit the earth." They shall "go from strength to strength," from victory to victory, weak, and yet mighty, poor, and yet always rich; for, however the world may oppose them, or Satan rage against them, the Lord will always say, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not;" the kingdom of heaven is reserved for those who shall "receive it as a little child."

III.

STEPS TOWARDS LOVE.

JOHN xxi. 15–19.

"So, when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep. Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wou'dest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me."

III.

WE have no information as to what became of Simon Peter from the moment when the cock having crowed for the second time, the disciple, touched to the heart by the look his Master turned upon him, left the hall of the high priest weeping bitterly. Alone, in the middle of the night, in the streets of Jerusalem, where, we wonder, did he wander to in his misery? Did he understand, we ask ourselves, the full meaning of that sad and loving look? And when, lifted up on the cross, the Saviour prayed for His friends and His foes, was Peter standing near? had he come there to catch one other last look of that well-beloved Master? He is not indeed named among those who surrounded the cross. All that we know is that, on the morning of the resurrection, "while it was yet dark," Simon Peter was running to the sepulchre with that other disciple whom Jesus loved. The sepulchre was empty. Peter found

not what he sought, but Jesus had not forgotten His apostle. It is by the Sea of Tiberias that Peter shall have his heart's desire satisfied. There he will see again, as the Prince of life and of the resurrection, that Master whom he loved and yet denied. It is this appearance, this interview of Jesus with His fallen disciple, that St John describes in chap. xxi. 15–19 of his Gospel. The miraculous draught of fishes that the disciples had succeeded in bringing in, thanks to the Stranger who, standing on the shores of the lake, desired them to cast their nets on the right side of their boat, this it was that opened John's eyes, and he was the first to exclaim, "It is the Lord." All at once Peter, as though the Saviour were there on his account alone, casts himself into the sea, and he is the first to reach the shore, and to throw himself, before any of the rest, at the feet of Jesus. And then begins an interrogation which bears the stamp of divine origin, which is evidently no human invention. "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?" Such is the solemn question to which Peter was to reply, and which is recorded for our profit, and has its application to us also. "Simon, son of Jonas." Why Simon?

Had not the Master himself changed the disciple's name? Had He not said to him, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock *will* I build my church?" Yes, but it was to the disciple confessing his Lord, not to the natural man, that Jesus then spoke. A new name belongs only to a new man, and Peter's threefold fall proved how much of the old man remained within him still. It is with these three falls, three denials, that the three questions correspond. "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?" Thou didst believe thyself more strong and steadfast than any of the rest. Dost thou not see that thou art weakest of all, and that "he that trusteth in his own heart is a fool?" But when Jesus humbles the soul He does so only to exalt it. He does not cast away His poor disciple, He takes him back into His service, and saith unto him, "Feed my lambs, feed my sheep." But to be meet for this high office it is necessary that Peter should renounce himself, that he should no longer walk in his own ways, that he should "stretch forth his hands," and give himself to the Lord. Thus prepared, he will glorify Jesus both in life and death, and the Lord will be able to say to him, "Follow me."

Peter, we find, readily answers his Master, "Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee;" not at first understanding, but at last fully perceiving, the intention of Jesus in thus questioning him. Peter, through his humiliation, had acquired feelings which might well seem to be love, and it was this love he desired to lay at the feet of Jesus; and as the Saviour still seems to doubt, and repeats the self-same question for the third time, the grieved disciple exclaims, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee."

But it is no longer Peter with whom we have to do; it is with our own selves. Have we made any advance in love? We have already anticipated that this inquiry of the Lord is indeed the one momentous, one vital question; that all our Christianity, all the self-examinations of our consciences, are embodied in these few words, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" Jesus Christ is now at the door; He stands there and knocks, and requires an answer. He is about to search into the very thoughts and intents of our hearts. When He has laid them all bare, will

we be able to say, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee?"

The subject of our present meditation is a very simple one; it is all included in one question that it deeply concerns us to put—What are we to do to love Christ?

Now, we must not begin by suggesting certain methods, or laying down certain rules; for human rules and methods do very little in this case. The Lord himself must come to us and work in us; for love is the one thing that we can least inspire our own hearts with. Let us look narrowly at ourselves, we are nothing but coldness and egotism; but if we submit ourselves to the Lord's discipline, He will take us in hand.

It was thus He dealt with the son of Jonas, and the same treatment will change the old man within us into the new nature. Jesus Christ will repeat His three questions; and these include three spiritual processes. We will see in what manner the Lord draws near to our intimate individual life, and how He who puts the question is He who gives the answer

To make some advances in love, this is what we desire above all things to learn. Well, then, how will Jesus proceed to satisfy our desire?

The first proceeding of the Lord will be this: He will give us the full remembrance of our faults. "Before I was afflicted I went astray," says the Psalmist; "but now have I kept thy word." A father of the Church has well observed that "the recollection of our sins is more profitable for us than the recollection of our virtues." The three grievous falls of Peter had a more favourable result upon his character than three successes would have had. Of all our enemies the greatest is self-confidence; and before this enemy can be slain, we must have many a humiliation. Peter depended upon his constitutional courage and prowess; but true love is something more than this. It is not in the heroism of nature that the Lord will dwell, but in humble and contrite hearts. Have we any distinct recollection of past faults? If we have, let us pray the Lord to quicken and intensify it. In the lives of all God's people there is one thing that, more than any other, ought to grieve and humble them, and that is, their cold

hearts. Are we happy with these hearts of ice? Are we contented to keep them unchanged? But, apart from this general condition, the more we search for our faults, the more of them we will discover. It is true that people are not fond of recalling what in them is amiss. What is the attitude of most men in this particular? Do they not resemble sentinels, armed at all points, and mounting guard over their honour, ready to fire upon any one who shall venture near? Where is there a man who is ready to make a definite confession of unworthiness? Oh, there is nothing so painful as to be driven to say, "I have sinned in this matter," and to return again and again to that positive consciousness. Just as a spider wraps itself in its web, so does the old man ensconce himself in subtle justifications. There may be a thousand apparent humiliations, and scarcely one that is frank, genuine, unqualified, and profound.

There are, indeed, certain people who are comparatively prone to confession, but who yet seem to derive no benefit from the recollection of their sins. It only serves to disgust them with themselves, and thus they are rendered gloomy, capricious, and spiritless. The reason of this is that

they are alone with their faults, and this we must never venture to be; we must take them all to Jesus, and pour them out in His gracious presence. If the remembrance of our own misdeeds is ever to be of use to us, we must place ourselves beneath His questioning, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" Then, indeed, we will be struck to the heart; but it will only be our old nature that will suffer—the new man will remain unhurt. When Jesus humbles us, the effect is very different from that produced upon us by self-reproaches, or by the lectures and rebukes of other men. The humiliations inflicted by Jesus are surrounded by peace, and where peace is, there is freedom, joy, life eternal.

Therefore, "my son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every one whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons: for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons." It was thus that St Peter's character was formed,—thus that his heart was

brought into fellowship with that of his Divine Master. Let us submit ourselves to the same discipline, and we too shall be able to say, "Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee."

And now comes the second step that Jesus takes towards us. He shows us that we have sheep to feed, and that those sheep are His. "What sheep?" we inquire. Let us open our eyes wide, and we will discover souls that have been confided to our care, and towards whom we may be a blessing. These souls are the Lord's, and we may judge of their preciousness in His sight by the price He paid for their ransom. To create the world we live in, God employed only six successive fiats; but to save the souls that He had created, it was necessary that He should not spare "His only-begotten Son,"—that He should make Him "a curse for us." The most deeply-fallen soul is still more precious than earth or sky, for sin is no part of man's essential substance. Sin is only the fall of man, and in the most guilty and polluted souls God still sees His own image. That soul is still a sheep, to be brought home to the fold; and it is to us perhaps that the rescue is con-

fided. That beggar that we chance to meet,—that poor man in his garret,—that sufferer on his litter,—that prisoner, unapproachable till now,—that savage feasting on the blood of his enemy,—degraded as they may be, each of these men have a soul, and that soul was "created in the image of God." The Father created it, the Son died for it, the Holy Spirit desires to sanctify it. Do we understand now the full force of the appeal, "Feed my lambs, feed my sheep?" We need not go far to find such of these as are our personal care. Let us begin beneath our own roof: do we esteem each of the souls collected there according to their value in God's sight, and not in proportion as they tend to increase our carnal satisfaction? And, besides these, do we not daily come in contact with other souls? Have we nothing for these sheep?—nothing for these lambs? Think of our own last hour—we will retain nothing then but what we have given. "It is better to give than to receive;" and of all regrets the most acute will be, "I might perhaps have been of some benefit to one or other of my brethren, and I failed to be so, and to-day it is too late." For love of ourselves, oh let us spare ourselves that

regret. There is a whole hell in selfishness indulged; there is a whole eternity of glory in a heart ready to devote itself; and there is no one on earth so poor, so meanly endowed, as to be able to assert, "I have received from the Lord no lamb in charge, no sheep to feed."

What is meant by this feeding of the sheep? It signifies the exertion of a salutary influence over a human soul. We ought to show that soul that we ourselves have peace with God, and that this peace may be had "without money and without price." What we have received for ourselves, have we not also received for our fellow-creatures? "When thou art converted," says the Lord to Peter, "strengthen thy brethren." But let it be conceded that we have no souls at hand to care for; have we no calling of any kind? The sheep of Christ are not only persons, but things. The smallest work becomes worship, if we do it in the love of Christ. The poorest employment, the dullest occupation, assumes a celestial character if we say to ourselves the while, "The Master is here, and calleth for me." To feed His sheep is to be "faithful in small things," when no one sees us, and no one rewards us.

Let us ask ourselves every evening, "For whom have I been living during the day past?—in what spirit have I worked?" The cause of our unhappiness, our discontent, does not lie in the nature of our vocations, but in our heart being turned earthwards,—in our spirit of bondage,—in our will not being where our treasure is. But wheresoever Jesus may be, His reward is with Him. We will no more "labour in vain," and "spend our strength for nought, if whatsoever we do, we do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men." That which the right hand doeth without the left hand knowing it, our Father, who seeth in secret, shall recompense openly. This will be a sign that we have understood the injunction, "Feed my lambs, feed my sheep." And Jesus has only now one last word to speak to us.

This is the third approach of the Lord to our souls. Stretch forth thy hand, let thyself be carried, walk whither thou wouldest not.

When Peter was young he girded himself, he walked whither he would; later, he stretched out his hands, and another girded him, carried him whither in his youth he would not.

Youth is the age of illusions. One sees before one a long future, and fancy decks it with brilliant colours; one has strength to spend and to spare, a heart to bestow, a will to act and overcome; one runs to meet obstacles and opposition like a hero sure beforehand of victory. But later on in life everything changes; the world grows pale, hope dies away, one's own energy no longer suffices, heart and will grow full of sadness and depression. The fact is, one had not understood the meaning of life, one had been so taken up in hewing out "cisterns that held no water," that the fountain of living water had remained unseen. Such had Peter been, such has been many a one amongst us. If we turn and look at the course of our past years, what is it we see? A time when we walked according to the course of this world, as it pleased our self-will, without knowledge of "the things that were for our peace." Well, then, how is it with us now? Has He who came for Peter come for us also? Has He asked us that searching question, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" Are we at length satiated with the world, weary of self? Oh, it is indeed a solemn hour when the will at last gives way, when the heart begins

to understand, and a new world opens out above our heads! Another was to come for Peter, to stretch out his hands, to gird him, and carry him whither he would not. That other was the executioner; that predicted way was the way of the cross. And if we ask the worldly man to sacrifice his idolatrous will, we too will be an executioner in his eyes. The new way that we propose to him will be a torture and a cross. But let that man once begin to love, and he will feel that the cross and the Saviour are only one and the same. It is no longer the dread executioner that summons him, it is the living God who asks, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" Standing between two worlds, two wills, two ways, a soul that grace has effectually touched will no longer hesitate; it will say to itself, "When I was young, I girded myself, and walked whither I would; but since another is come, and since it is towards Him that I stretch forth my hands, it is He that girds me and carries me whither before I would not go." Thus all resistance ceases, the will has grown docile, the heart is won for ever. The influence of grace has prevailed over the impulse of nature, the man is determined to know

nothing else but Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Oh, my soul, who hast thyself come to Him, who art no more thine own "but bought with a price," say, dost thou regretfully look back to the liberty of thy youth since that Other is come and thou hast submitted thyself to His dominion? Those lost years, that time past, when thou followedst after shadows, wouldst thou, if thou couldst, recall them, now that thou art able to say, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee?"

Lastly, we read, "And when he had spoken this, Jesus said unto Peter, Follow me."

We who hear this saying of the Master's, whom have we followed hitherto? Life is a journey. This is a trite expression, but we do not ponder it enough. But whither have we been travelling up to this moment? What is the habitual tendency of our soul and our leading interest in life? Is it indeed Jesus, Jesus alone, Jesus always and everywhere? Are we at length thoroughly convinced of the deceitfulness of all other guides? Do we at length realise how much we are beloved, and that a heavenly Friend has laid down

His life for us? There is a historical Jesus Christ in the Gospels, but this same Saviour is in our daily life. We may, as it were, handle Him and see. Is it thus intimately, practically, that we know Him, for to know Him thus is life eternal? And we do know Him if He has brought our sins to remembrance, if He has shown us that we have sheep to feed, if He has inclined our thoughts and desires towards Himself. "One thing is needful." Jesus says, "Follow me." Let us enter, then, the narrow way, and we shall have life, yea, we shall have it more abundantly. "Faithful is He that hath called us;" "His ways are not our ways, neither are His thoughts our thoughts;" but "all the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth for such as keep His covenant and His testimonies." Let us walk on boldly, "be strong, and very courageous;" we are not alone; "our shoes shall be iron and brass; and as our day, so shall our strength be." We are so poor, alas! so poor still, and we might be so rich! Let us look only upon Him who asks us, "Simon, son of Jonas,"—poor, weak disciple that hast denied Me thrice,—"lovest thou me?" Let us submit ourselves to His work in us, and we will find the answer. Peter, in the

way of the cross, was already able to say, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee;" but the true answer is the one we shall only give when we know even as we are known. We now know in part, and our heart does not always experimentally say, "Lord, Thou art love." But when we shall see the Lord face to face, and look back upon our life as a whole,—when what now seems confusion shall be recognised as harmony, and from the centre of light and life eternal, Jesus shall once more ask us, "Simon, son of Jonas," art thou satisfied with me? "lovest thou me?" ah, then we shall have eyes to see and a heart to answer! Meanwhile, my soul, press onward, silently, with steady gaze fixed upon thy crown. There is a fulness that can never be exhausted. We may well fight when we are assured of victory, and after the toil and the sweat of a day of battle, we shall have a whole eternity to rest in.

IV.

LOST AND SAVED.

MATTHEW viii. 1-4.

"When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him. And, behold, there came a leper, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them."

IV.

MAN smitten with an incurable disease all at once finds a Physician, and with him new life : this man is a leper. Oh, we who enjoy health, a home, a family circle, and a position in the world, we scarcely know perhaps what it is to be a leper. It is good, then, that we should know, were it only that we may say to ourselves, " Who is it that maketh me to differ, and what have I that I have not received? And if I have received it—why glory I, as though I had not received it?" A leper is no ordinary sufferer; he would gladly exchange his lot with that of a blind man, a paralytic, a destitute beggar by the wayside, for the most miserable of men have yet resources that the leper lacks. Look at his frame. " From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrifying sores; they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment." Nor is this all, but he is also an outcast from the

fellowship of the living. He has no longer any right to dwell in the midst of his kind. With head bare and garments torn, he wanders alone with his sufferings, without fixed abode or human shelter. If he sees a traveller coming towards him, he must warn him, must cry aloud, "Come not nigh me—I am a leper!" The sun rises, the sun goes down, the earth decks itself with verdure, and the trees with leaves:—for him alone there is no spring, no revival, no sun with healing in its beams. His hope is death, his only asylum the grave. Such was the case of the man that Jesus Christ met on His descent from the mount, and from that moment a new history begins. There is a Physician for incurables, one who in no wise casts out those that come to Him. When the man is radically lost and hopeless, the work of Jesus Christ begins. He sees the leper, and He is moved with compassion. Here we have an incident that it would never have entered the mind of man to conceive. The leper prostrates himself at the feet of Jesus, and cries, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean," and that cry penetrates to the heart of Jesus. He does more than merely stop, He stretches forth His hand, and that hand seeks the

wretched man, and does not shrink from touching him. There is an actual contact between the sufferer and the Physician, and this contact it is which imparts fresh life and produces a new creature. Elsewhere we read, "The whole multitude sought to touch Him, for there went virtue out of Him, and healed them all." This operating virtue dwells in the word of the Lord; He says to the leper, "I will; be thou clean: and immediately his leprosy was cleansed."

We should receive an exalted impression of Jesus Christ if this single circumstance were all we knew of Him. This superhuman power, this sympathy more divine still,—these are of themselves sufficient to win our hearts. But this single incident is but the symbol of something more sublime and more universal. There is a leper in still worse plight than the leper of the Gospel, and that is a poor sinner when he becomes aware of his own condition. Let us look for the history in our own lives, and there, where the leper is, we shall also find the Physician. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners:" LOST and SAVED; there we have the whole Bible, the sum-

mary of Christian life; what is more, cometh of evil.

When God intends to create a saint, He first of all creates a poor sinner. Whoever sketches such a one, must consider him as he is at three different epochs of his life. There is a time when Jesus Christ is nothing in his eyes, a time when He is something, and a time when He is all in all.

We may meet many characters very different the one from the other, and at first sight having no more resemblance than there is between a European and a negro. But if we look a little below the surface, it is still one and the same man, whom the Bible describes as "dead in trespasses and sins." Here is a galley-slave, who has a retrospect of open and odious crimes and a heart as hard as the nether millstone. Here is an industrious mechanic, who, because he provides food for his household, believes this the only sort of religion worth having. Here is a man of pleasure, who runs from gaiety to gaiety, from one social gathering to another, and the language of whose heart is, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." Here is an ambitious man, who considers himself raised far above the

vulgar throng, and only mixes with them on rare occasions; his god is his own reputation, his hope the name he will leave behind him. Here is a respectable man, who walks with head upright, without fear or reproach; his good name is worth an unlimited credit to him, if he wants a large sum, a larger will be offered him. Here is a philanthropist, who seeks to cure the misery of the day by charitable bazaars and benevolent societies. Finally, here is a thoroughly orthodox man, who has always believed the Bible; he has only one fault, he does not like you to bring it home to him individually. All these are very different characters. Well, then, if we probe deeper, at bottom we will find they are all essentially the same. One is a monster indeed, another a genius, but what they all alike lack in God's husbandry is conversion.

All these men can do without Jesus Christ, they have so many resources in themselves! But God can bring us into straits, and then something more is required than our own personality. This is the time of the first shaking. The same man we have seen so self-satisfied has been struck, and now illusions fall away, possessions escape, accusations

appear. The leper is on his way, but the wound does not yet appear a hopeless one. The pricks are kicked against, but it is an unequal struggle. When God lays His hand upon us, we must needs lie prostrate. When He "with rebukes doth correct man for iniquity, He maketh his beauty to consume away like a moth." We want the void filled, the unrest stilled, the sad heart consoled, the uneasy conscience pacified. The Saviour is at the door, we are moving towards Him, but we do not as yet know Him as He who is "come to seek and to save the lost."

But this is the manner in which at length we must know Him. The taint of sin will increase till it becomes a universal curse. All these separate evils meet as it were in the depths of our souls, and make us feel that the very source of life is attacked. We thought we were familiar with our own disposition, but it reveals itself now for the first time under its true colours. We feel ourselves confronted with a withered spirit, a heart desperately wicked, a will that refuses to surrender, fleshly lusts that war against the soul. We would fain heal ourselves, but the more we labour the more sin revives, the leprosy has fairly broken out,

a miracle is needed for its cure, the poor sinner is formed within us.

This is the hour when Jesus Christ comes down from the mountain. To the work of sin succeeds the work of a compassion that leaves far behind it all human pity. Everywhere there are hospitals, sick nurses, benevolent ladies; we live in a day of collections, societies, industrial charities of every kind, but that which is almost always found lacking is true compassion. Up to what point do we enter into the miseries of others, and how long will our sympathy and tenderness last? What fruit have our labours, our runnings to and fro, our surrender of the superfluities of life, our readings by the sick bed, hitherto produced? What diseased souls have they enlivened? and in what spirit have we carried them on? We should reflect seriously, examine ourselves, and we will allow that we have all our work to begin afresh. We who have a sick person to tend, a troublesome child to educate, a poor relation to support, if we had to give account of our own amount of pity, would it not be the revelation of another case of leprosy? Ah! the compassions of the Lord are something indeed very different. They are new every morning; His is a

mercy that endureth for ever, a charity that never faileth, a faithfulness that is always great. His is also the only pity which is no "respecter of persons." "The Lord is loving unto every man, and his mercies are over all his works." Has our charity this universal character? There are two sufferers who implore our aid; are we not conscious of a predilection for the one and an antipathy to the other? If we were to live for thirty-three years with a leper, to touch him constantly, to console and cheer him day after day, how much of our compassion would endure? But let us "lift our eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh our hope"—it is thence that the one true pity descends. Is it one leper only that Jesus Christ touched, and over whom His bowels yearned? Was it not rather towards a whole nation that He stretched forth His hands, towards those whom He beheld lying in their blood, and that no other than He could heal? And if He touched those lepers, was it not with His own hand that He did so? Did He not take upon Himself our humanity, appearing "in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin?" Yes, in those stretched-out hands, in their contact with the leper, we read the eternal purpose of God and our election

in Jesus Christ before the creation of the world; we see how, "according to the good pleasure of His will," "He hath made us accepted in the beloved, in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace, wherein he hath abounded towards us, that he might gather together all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth."

And as Jesus Christ has taken upon Him our flesh, so, too, being touched with a feeling of our infirmities, He will share His own nature with us. The leper touched and made clean is a type of the sinner changed by grace, and renewed in the spirit of his mind and the very thoughts and intents of his heart. An actual meeting with Jesus implies a death-stroke to the old man, and a new principle of life animating our mortal bodies, and renewing the will by converting it to God. The work of grace is decided when the will is decided, and no longer tied and bound by sin. It is faith that brings about this miracle. Faith in Jesus is also a new will, and He who enables us to will, will also enable us to do of His good pleasure. "Sin shall no more have dominion over us," for we will no longer "let it reign in our mortal bodies,

to obey it in the lusts thereof." And that this may be the case with us, we should "reckon ourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." If sin still harass and afflict us, let us look at our old man on the cross of Calvary; it was there "that the body of sin was destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." We should say no more, "Oh, wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?" but rather, "Thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

The leper, then, is cleansed; but Jesus says to him, "See thou tell no man; but go thy way, show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them." "See thou tell no man!" Wherefore this prohibition, which we find elsewhere? The Lord had two reasons for this—one that concerned Himself, and the other the leper. "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation," but "distils as the dew;" it is not the work of man, nor does it manifest itself in the human way. Man sounds the trumpet, needs publicity, proclamations, attention, applause; Jesus Christ does "not cry nor lift up, nor cause His voice to be heard in the

streets." He will not have the multitude crowd round, bear Him on their shoulders, make Him a king by force. It is not to be "by might nor by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts."

The other reason concerned the leper himself. "See thou tell no man," is a counsel given to new converts. Conversion is an interior life, and it is the hidden man that has to grow—it is not words that are needed. Nothing more tends to deteriorate and enfeeble than religious gossip. Let the sentiment of piety preserve its modest reticence. Opportunities to speak may come by and by. Meanwhile, "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ;" the kingdom of God consists "not in words but in power."

The cleansed leper is to show himself to the priest. This was the first step, and then the priest was to look, and if the plague of leprosy were healed in the leper, he would pronounce him clean. Such was the law; and in this happy case, the leper had but to make an offering to be restored to fellowship with the people.

Now there is in all this a spiritual sense which we may easily discern. The law only reveals, only testifies to the existence of sin; it is not the law

that heals. "I had not known sin," says St Paul, "without the law; for I had not known lust except the law had said unto me, Thou shalt not covet." But a soul no longer under the law, but under grace, may venture to confront the law, since "there is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." The law is not abolished, but the legal spirit is so. One fears no longer, and whatever duties are fulfilled will be fulfilled with a willing mind. The law that formerly condemned is become a law that "restores the soul, sweeter than honey, more precious than fine gold." The leper who has been cleansed will joyfully "offer the gift," and that gift is according to our text to be "for a testimony." Oh, let those whom grace has touched, say what gift will they bring, and what is their testimony when mercy has been shown them?

The sovereign sacrifice is the living sacrifice of our own selves; and this is no longer grievous when once we have been redeemed from "our former vain conversation." The Lord's compassions have a might which can of "these stones raise up children to Abraham," and which makes us "more than conquerors through

Him that loved us." The testimony that it behoves us to bear before the world is, that "we love Him who first loved us," but there is no one except the poor pardoned sinner who can truly love. There are many respectable people in the world, having pious characters in the Church; but what the Church and the world alike lack are poor sinners, who feel themselves such. The word is so common!—the thing signified so rare! Are we lepers? Then, and then only, will we truly know Him who "loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to God." It is these cleansed lepers who conquer the world, and whose testimony is irresistible. Plato was wont to say that "the most beautiful of all sights is a beautiful soul in a beautiful body;" but there is a spectacle more beautiful still—the saving work of God in a lost soul. What is the favourite spectacle to the angels in heaven?—what is their supremest joy? It is a "sinner that repenteth." The prodigal son, heart-broken and in rags, is fairer than those "ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance." Ah, when we have suffered from our sins, and felt the hand of the Great Physician, we can also love,

and gladly would we offer a gift "for a testimony." If words fail, at least there are tears—at least we can point, we can say, "Look unto Him and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth." This will be a testimony to those who are still without; their eyes will open; they will go along with us; for they will perceive that the knowledge we possess is also life eternal.

V.

THE WITHERED AND THE FRESH.

LUKE vi. 6-10.

"And it came to pass also on another sabbath, that he entered into the synagogue and taught: and there was a man whose right hand was withered. And the scribes and Pharisees watched him, whether he would heal on the sabbath-day; that they might find an accusation against him. But he knew their thoughts, and said to the man which had the withered hand, Rise up, and stand forth in the midst. And he arose, and stood forth. Then said Jesus unto them, I will ask you one thing; Is it lawful on the sabbath-days to do good, or to do evil? to save life, or to destroy it? And looking round about upon them all, he said unto the man, Stretch forth thy hand. And he did so: and his hand was restored whole as the other."

V.

"THEY that are whole need not the physician, but they that are sick." For whom was it that Christ Jesus came first, and for whom does He come still? For those who suffer, who have some disease to be healed of. And certain sufferings exist which we none of us guess at, concealed as they are beneath apparently robust health,—beneath the most brilliant exterior, the most advanced Christianity. Our motto discloses to us "a man whose right hand was withered." Who would have thought of that hand in the crowded synagogue? Jesus alone discovers it, and He alone has power to cure it. This cure was wrought on the Sabbath-day, as indeed the true Sabbath is ever that day on which the Saviour does a healing work. But it was not thus the Pharisees understood the nature of the Sabbath: they had only come to the synagogue to perform their devotions;

their religion could well have dispensed with Jesus Christ. Not so with the man afflicted with the withered hand; he needed deliverance, and he turns to the Lord to obtain it. His complaint, indeed, was not an acute one; he was able to go out, to attend the synagogue; he still retained a measure of activity; but what use could he make of it when one of his hands was withered? Suppose ourselves similarly tried, and we will at once see how all our energies would be paralysed and frustrated. But let us transplant this disease into the sphere of spiritual life. There is a state of soul which, more than any other, distresses the Christian — it is a withered state. A withered heart, withered conversation, withered relations of various kinds,—all these are so many causes of grief. For withering is death—death with a certain disguise—and the strongest proof of not having life within ourselves is our being thus withered. If we exert ourselves, throw ourselves into business; or, on the other hand, pray, meditate—what is it that we feel in the long run?—a secret weariness, an exhaustion of energy, a spiritual extinction, a withered state — in a word, death. If, indeed, this state brought you to Christ, as it did the sufferer

who showed his withered hand to the Saviour—but, unfortunately, this does not always occur to the mind. One is dead, and yet continues to play the part of the living;—one ought to be silent, and yet goes on speaking—nay, perhaps preaching;—one is fit for nothing, and yet one perseveres in moving and acting. Perhaps this mechanical course of action is a source of suffering to-day, but habit comes in here with its reconciling tendency; to-morrow even one will suffer less. One grows used to this automatic existence, continues to keep up appearances; and, ere long, one becomes unconscious of the extent to which death reigns, and Pharisaism and hypocrisy have corroded the soul. But be it as it may with us, Jesus Christ draws near. He will have compassion on our withered state; He will cause such a life as this to become unsupportable, and will lead us to stretch forth our withered hands to the One who can restore them; "for in Him is life," and He is "rich unto all that call upon Him."

Let us look at the miracle wrought in the man with the withered hand. Jesus Christ had said to him, "Rise up and stand forth in the midst." This man obeys, he has faith, and new life at once

pervades the stretched-out hand. He draws it back whole as the other. There it is, free in all its movements; and its activity will henceforth take a new character—life has succeeded to death —health to withering.

Let us examine these two states more narrowly. They show us what we are in ourselves, and what is the power of grace when we submit ourselves to its influence with sincerity and faith.

Let us apply this image of the withered hand to the affairs of everyday life.

We should first of all look at this hand engaged in its daily work. There are many men who work on, but drily, mechanically, their labour a hard, forced labour, and their spirit purely mercenary. As the ox drags the plough, so are there many chained to a vocation that they perhaps secretly execrate, but continue to carry on because their subsistence depends on it. Whoever thinks only of manual labour, of the mechanic or the galley-slave, in this connexion, is mistaken. All of us are included in it. Which of us has never worked with extreme reluctance, although we went on working? Which of us never sighed after the end

of a task? and has not our external assiduity been stimulated by the desire to be soon rid of an uncongenial occupation? It was a duty that had to be done, but it was accomplished—we knew it well—not with a living impulse, but a withered hand. Active in the eyes of the world, slothful in the sight of God, we continued thus to do dead works which have already had their reward. Who was the worker in a case like this? Surely a man whose right hand was withered.

We have seen how such a one works; let us now see how he rests. There is a mechanical repose, as there is a mechanical exertion. This withered hand, after having toiled six days, how does it rest on the seventh? Still as withered, without experiencing the very least spiritual refreshment. It is a machine that stops, but cessation from toil is not yet the beginning of rest. For it is God alone who bestows true repose, or rather the only true repose is in God himself. To retire into His presence, to find consolation there for all fatigue and all disappointment, this is the only way of really resting and recruiting one's strength, but this is not the rest that we ordinarily seek. The rest of the majority is dissipation, and dissipation is but

another form of fatigue. They would escape from God, and this is only in order to throw themselves into greater agitation. That incessant change of thought, that wandering of the heart, those caprices, those vain desires, what is it they bring us in?—a new fund of dissatisfaction, an increased withering. The soul needs to have its real wants aroused, and in order that activity should enjoy rest, the soul itself must rest, and this rest of the soul is the one thing needful.

But further. There is also such a thing as a withered hand in the bestowal of charity. How many alms, collections, charitable enterprises, are the work of a withered right hand. We give, but we give not ourselves with our gift; and true charity is self-sacrifice. It is not the action itself that constitutes virtue; it is the sentiment, the motive, that prompts it. "God looketh upon the heart," and the surrender that costs most is that of our own person. We resist when we are called upon to break with our own individual preferences, and to take pleasure in renunciation. And what is the consequence? Instead of that warm throbbing charity which knows how to "rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep," one

has only a withered right hand, the form instead of the substance, the reputation of charity instead of the living and blessed reality.

We may also picture to ourselves two withered hands working together, two partners, or associates it may be, who require each other at present, but whom the least motive of self-interest will avail to separate; or two friends having the same tastes but whose friendship has not passed through the strait gate. We shall soon see in this case that mere natural sympathies are "plants that the heavenly Father has not planted;" they will fade away, for all that is earthly, fair though it be, will surely wither. Or we may take two married people who, when they gave themselves to each other, had not first of all given themselves to the Lord. Theirs will be a withered union; if not at first, yet before long. There are unions amongst us which are cold as the grave; each party grows accustomed to the other, and they call that mutual indifference by the name of love! Alas! what is the union of hands if it be not the union of souls as well, and the communion of that life which shall never end?

And there is also a withered hand which, in order to be rendered whole, has recourse to other phy-

sicians than Jesus. How many Christians try to vivify themselves by their own efforts! They are aware of certain faults that beset them, and attempt to remedy these by their own strength: they attempt to soar, but they resemble eagles whose pinions have been clipped. They are far from feeling the extent to which their nature is inwardly affected. The cure applied to one diseased part only leads to the discovery of others. It is the history of the Hydra of Lerma: to behead one sin avails nothing, —they must all be beheaded,—and fresh ones go on sprouting day by day. But who is sufficient for these things? Some other Hercules than our own selves is surely needed here. The hand that wields the sword is a withered hand. Let each confess what he has obtained by all the resolutions he has taken again and again. Our Christianity reduced to itself is but a dry and pointless thing. If we stretch forth at last the withered hand to Jesus; if we ask Him for life, He will give it us abundantly. The man before us has, we see, found the true Physician. Jesus had but to speak one word, and the dead hand was whole as the other. But what is meant by stretching forth the hand to Christ? It means the groaning, the sighing after a cure. If

we probe our palsied state to the quick, we will find that we are separated from God, "dead in trespasses and sins;" and this discovery will be only an additional suffering. But that which is needed in the case of a dead man is a new birth. Let him believe in Jesus Christ, and this second life will be imparted to him. Let him pour out his wretchedness before Him, and the grace of Christ will take effect. Oh, let us not any longer seek within our own selves for the strength necessary to bring about this renewal; this strength is in the Saviour that God has given us. All other physicians are physicians of no value; their words are vain, and "like unto ashes." Jesus Christ alone is the life, and "he that hath the Son hath life." Let us believe that God has loved us, and that in this has God's love been manifested towards us, that while "we were yet sinners Christ died for us." We should enter by faith and in faith into this miracle of grace; it is the gift of God, and this gift is also a power. To believe is to receive. If we believe, the withered hand will regain life; and being rooted in faith, we will have new strength, strength sufficient to triumph over our tendency towards withering and death.

We have contemplated the withered hand; let us now consider the hand that is whole; and, to follow out our metaphor, let us designate this happy condition of the true Christian — freshness. Freshness, as a general principle, rejoices the heart, causes it to expand; this is continually exemplified in everyday life. If one take a flower newly blown, and covered still with the dew of morning, he is involuntarily arrested: it is as though he had surprised life at its very source. That tender green, that half-opened calyx, that delicate fragrance spreading round, have all an irresistible power over his feelings: "Lo the winter is past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land."

Again, we may look at a little child, rosy and fresh, running towards us. We are so happy to welcome him; we take him on our knees, and delight ourselves in his infantine life. That innocence in his voice, his movements, his caresses, goes straight to the hardest heart, and disarms it for a time. Nothing dry here—nothing forced, constrained. All is spontaneous,—life, joy, happiness.

Or we may turn to a convalescent, who feels new life begin to circulate in his veins. A serious illness had brought him within a hairsbreadth of the tomb; after weeks of suffering he is at length able to rise, and his shattered strength returns. Place him on a carpet of fresh grass; let the sun warm his pallid face; let the free breeze play round him;—it is as though one opened out to him a new world. Yet there is nothing changed without—the change is in himself alone. He has received other sensations; the freshness of health is like a resurrection from the dead.

But this natural freshness is but the emblem of a higher, which is the restoration of our normal condition. Where are we to find this more exquisite freshness?

First of all, in Jesus Christ himself. In Him we see perfect humanity, such as it sprang first out of the hands of God. Whether He speak or act, He is still the same truth, that which is also the life of men. In Him there is no withering—no exhaustion; one can behold a fulness from whence proceeds grace for grace. Whosoever looks upon Him is lightened, and death has lost his sting, and the grave its victory. It is the sight of this

incorruptibility in humanity which makes one forget this arid earth, in which he is thirsty and has no water.

This imperishable freshness, too, is to be met with in the Bible. Open it at random, and everywhere we find *life*—no decay, no withering there. We may read and re-read the same chapter, the same verse, we will not exhaust them. They are the green pastures, the still waters of every soul weary of the world—weary perchance of itself also. We return from a prolonged walk or conversation, bringing back, it may be, an anxiety, or the discovery of some unexpected sorrow; a thousand things press on us and exhaust us: there are often, for soul and body, seasons of general depression and weakness. Well, then, that which best refreshes, best restores our disturbed serenity, are the promises of the sacred Scriptures. God sends His Word forth, and it heals: "it satisfies the fainting soul," and "filleth every hungry soul with plenteousness." We become conscious at such times of the difference between the heavenly manna and this world's light bread. Refreshed, revived in the very love of our heart, we will once more exclaim: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of

everlasting life;" "We were poor and needy, but the Lord cared for us;" "Thou art our helper and our deliverer; blessed are all they that put their trust in thee."

Or we may send our thoughts in another direction. This quality of freshness, which is in the heart of Jesus Christ and in the heart of the Bible, is also to be found in the sorrows of a poor sinner. Nothing, indeed, is so instructive as the spectacle offered by a poor sinner, always fainting and always sustained. He is never out of alarm, and never either out of the hands of God. Before him he sees mountains of difficulty, beside him abysses of terror; and those "mountains are brought low, those valleys are exalted, the crooked is made straight, and the rough places plain." He walks on from miracle to miracle, and he fears always, groans always. Six afflictions are safely passed, but here is the seventh? How shall he be able to endure it?

Once more the angel of the Lord encampeth about him, and delivers him. But what makes him suffer most of all is that "right hand of his which is withered." He is so dissatisfied with all he does, that he looks upon himself as a barren

fig-tree, and God takes these very efforts of his and turns them into blessings to many. It is in earthen vessels that the Lord displays His great power, and it is to those who have nothing that He gives all things.

Thus life goes on, and grace is still the same. The poor sinner does not believe this, but he shall yet know it — yea, he shall know it to the end. There is an undying work carrying on in our weakness, and our wretchedness stirs up the gift that is in us, and we will believe afresh that the divine mercies are new every morning, and that the Lord's faithfulness is unchangeably great.

But this is not all. This goodness and mercy that follow us all the days of our life are but the earnest of something greater, far greater; for we are not yet, we know not yet, what we shall be.

What is the reason that all fresh things have for us so ineffable a charm? It is because they give us a presentiment of our own resurrection. That flower just blown, that little child so radiant with life, that rapture of convalescence,—all these are but shadows of a greater happiness, to which every day brings us nearer. We see as through a

glass darkly, that garment of incorruption which we shall wear when the former things have passed away. We would be well content to lead a pardoned life, and God has reserved for us a glorious eternity. Yet a little time, and we shall shine in a body made like to the Son of God, and we will be possessors of a heritage that fadeth not away, and inhabitants of a city that hath eternal foundation. Christ himself tells us, "Because I live, ye shall live also." He has promised us the glory given Him by His Father. Do we now understand this withered hand stretched forth to the Lord? It typifies the earnest expectation of creatures waiting, ay groaning, for the "manifestation of the sons of God." They have indeed received the first-fruits of the Spirit; but for all that they sigh and travail in pain and bondage. They feel that while they are present with the body, they are absent from the Lord. Hence they "groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with a house which is from heaven." For this reason the Spirit and the Bride say Come, and he that heareth also says Come—Come to free us from this body of corruption, to swallow it up for ever in Thine own life and Thine own incorruption. And He who bear-

eth witness replies, "Surely I come quickly." The voice that spake to the man whose right hand was withered, "Rise up, and stand forth in the midst," that voice shall penetrate into the dust of the sepulchre. The time draws on "when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear it shall live." Once more the command shall go forth, "Rise, and stand in the midst." And then the body sown in corruption, dishonour, weakness, as a natural body, shall be raised in incorruption, glory, power, as a spiritual body. It will stand there amazed, transplanted in the midst of a new creation, "of the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and of an innumerable company of angels, and of the spirits of just men made perfect." The withered hand, then, shall be whole as the other, capable of serving God in righteousness and true holiness. Meanwhile let us be followers of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises; and poor and obscure as our path may be, let us remember that "the path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

VI.

A TRIAL OF FAITH.

MATTHEW xv. 21–28.

"Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour."

VI.

AS we advance in the Christian life, we learn to lay ever greater stress upon faith. Of all the divine operations, it is the most beautiful, the most fruitful, the most essential; and accordingly the Saviour designates it as the work above all others, the work of God. Even charity, which is the end of the commandment, springs from faith, proceeding, we are told, "out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned." We look with admiration at Christopher Columbus venturing forth on seas unknown, animated by the substance of things hoped for, and strong in the evidence of things not seen; but Christian faith dares more, and ventures further; its goal is the eternal world, its way through the great deep of trials and dangers. And that which gives life and energy to faith is not the full light, not wellbeing and ease, but rather conflict, darkness, deprivation; the souls most "rooted and grounded in the faith" are those which

have been the most shaken, the most battered by the strong wind and the tempest. When all false supports are broken down, room is made for the full putting forth of the "power of God unto salvation," and for that faith that also "overcometh the world." The gospel, which instructs us by examples oftener than by precepts, abounds in illustrations of faith of this kind. We have the centurion of Capernaum, the leper, the blind man near Jericho, and many other diseased men and women; but all these cases seem feeble compared to that recorded of the woman of Canaan. It was of this Syrophenician woman that the Saviour himself preeminently bore witness, exclaiming, "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt." In her faith we find a vigour, a perseverance, a dauntless courage which render it truly a representative faith for all time. And yet there was much that might well have discouraged the woman of Canaan at the very onset; to be treated as she was treated, and yet not to be offended in Christ, and to "hold fast the profession of her faith without wavering!" This is the apprenticeship we have to serve, if our relations with Jesus Christ are to have the same blessed results. We marvel how a heathen woman

should have attained to such a height of Christian excellence. The Lord, as we see, made her pass through trials. Now there are trials from without and trials from within, trials from circumstances and trials from self-conflict, and these latter far exceed the former in severity, and it was over these inner struggles that the Canaanitish woman won the victory. Lazarus, laid before the rich man's door, had indeed to wrestle with bodily suffering and the cares of this life, and this is doubtless a very hard, a very terrible case; but there are far more formidable enemies of our faith to be encountered in those discoveries that we make in ourselves, and those chains of evil habits of the old man which surge up suddenly in the dark abysses of our hearts. We have only got to follow Jesus in the narrow way, and we will learn self-knowledge, we will find, perhaps, that our conversion is by no means so thorough a one as others suppose it to be. But the case of this woman shows us another truth as well, and that is, that faith not only overcomes the world, but can triumph over the sinful heart. We may become stronger than our own evil tendencies, and this last conquest is greater far than any victory over external circum-

stance. But some may say, "Who is sufficient for these things?" Well, let us see. We are now contemplating A TRIAL OF FAITH. The Lord reveals Himself here as a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap; it is in the school of affliction that the woman of Canaan becomes what we here find her. She passes through three trials which have a general character, and it is on these three trials that we are about to dwell. The man of the world, indeed, knows nothing of them; but if only we walk with Jesus, they are sure to befall us one after the other, for the Saviour will not spare any of His people that discipline which they need, seeing that He loves us, and would have us "partakers of His holiness." Let us examine the history before us more closely, and we shall know the nature of the trials that await us.

"Jesus departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon." He was not in the habit of going so far, His mission, as He Himself declared, being primarily "to the lost sheep of the children of Israel." Nevertheless, He had other sheep which were not of that fold, them also must He bring, and they should hear His voice, and there should be "one fold and one shepherd." This poor

woman was one of these other sheep. She was an afflicted creature, who had a daughter sick and grievously tormented by a devil. This trial it is which leads her to seek the Saviour, of whom she had probably heard as of a "prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people." Such are the preliminary impressions that we may suppose her to have received; but when once she is face to face with Jesus, all will become clearer to her, she will be able to pray for herself. This Canaanitish woman knew neither the law nor the prophets, but she had all the spiritual wants of humanity, and it is as a loving and unhappy mother that she betakes herself to crying unto Jesus, "O Lord, thou son of David, have mercy on me!"

What answer does the Lord vouchsafe to her? At first, none at all; we read, "He answered her not a word." Already the first trial is come, and it is a great one. We cry to Jesus, and He makes us no answer whatsoever.

But let us examine a little more in detail this sorrowful experience, which may be ours to-morrow. There are trials which force us to cry unto

the Lord with strong crying and tears; trials for which ordinary prayers could not suffice. This poor soul's trial was a domestic one; and if we probe a little into family life, we shall find abundance of sad visitations there in our own day. But still the real trial of the Syrophenician may be said not to have begun; the trial of trials is when Jesus answers us not a word. With Him we can pass through fire and water unhurt; but we have not always the consciousness of His saving presence. The door of prayer is as it were closed against us: we ask, but we do not receive; we seek, but without finding; we knock, and yet no one opens to us. Our prayers fall back as from a heaven of brass; and when prayer is ineffectual, what remains? It is this silence, this immovableness of the Lord which causes anguish indeed! Alas, what a condition to be left alone in our self-conflict, with nothing but sorrow of every kind rising in our heart! At such moments the soul is in a very labyrinth; we hardly know ourselves again; our very character seems changed; everything that we have done hitherto seems mere lost labour. There is a general disorder in our intellect, a fearfulness and trembling has seized hold

of our heart, our will is entirely paralysed; "all His waves and billows have gone over us." This is our state without Jesus; it is well to know it, to remember it continually. "Jesus answered her not a word." Poor Canaanite, and nevertheless thou didst continue to pray; without any experience of the Lord's compassions, thou didst believe in them; the disciples would fain have sent thee away, and thy faith proved itself stronger than they were. Ah, there was something at work there greater than the woman, other than the woman. God was there; God in the soul, travailing, persisting, freeing the divine from its hindrances, and preparing one of those mighty works only to be found in the wretchedness and helplessness of a poor sinner.

But why this silence on the part of Jesus, which we shall probably ourselves have to encounter? For, as we said, the woman's trial is a general one, intended to teach us to *believe* in defiance of what we *feel*. We are too prone to exercise faith only when conscious of some comforting experience; and when our heart feels dead, and our prayers bear no result, we leave off believing. Now, this is not true faith, the language of true faith being, "Never-

theless, my soul, hope thou still on God, for of him cometh my salvation." That which sustained the Syrophenician was the living Saviour; on Him her eyes were fastened; it was on Him, not on herself, that she founded her hope. Immutability can never be ours,—it is no human attribute,—but there is a fulness which never varies, and this you have in the person of Jesus. His person includes His works, His promises, His everlasting love, His unceasing, unwearied intercessions. Whether He speak or be silent, whether he stretches out His hand to us, or hides Himself in the storm, He is living, He is faithful—He cannot deny Himself. Now, then, will we believe in Him—believe in Him once for all? Surely it is time that we should do this! But no; we go on looking at ourselves, testing ourselves as though our own impressions, our own words, were to be our saviour. We build upon the heights or depths of our own spirit, our own fears, or our own hopes—how, then, can we be steadfast, immovable? Why, this is the very way to sink into constant agitation, and never to attain to rest. What we need is a foundation upon the rock, and that rock is within our reach; it is "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday,

to-day, and for ever." What He was for the woman of Canaan, He is now for the chief of sinners. Only believe,—to believe is to "endure as seeing Him that is invisible." This is not easy, as I well know; but this is what we want, and therefore what we have to learn. And when are we to learn it? When all goes well, when we are in peace, surrounded with props, having need of nothing? Had this been the case with the woman before us, we should never have heard of her faith. "Jesus answered her not a word." This is the school of the true believer. But one asks, "What am I to do in the dark interval, when I am dead, when my heart faileth,—what am I to do then?" Why, we must wait. Have we not caused the Lord to wait? What have we been living upon to the present hour? Has it not been on the richness of His goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering? Is it not the long-suffering of our Lord that is salvation? And though He tarry, is it not our part to wait for Him, when we have the promise made us that "He will surely come, He will not tarry?" Thus the Psalmist: "I waited patiently for the Lord, and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry." "In re-

turning and rest shall ye be saved." But instead of that, we would fain ride upon horses. Remain still, wait: "It is good that a man should quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord." We should throw ourselves at the feet of Jesus, and lie there, like that woman we read of who was a sinner. That is the attitude that befits us; that alone is the one thing needful. He will hide us in His tabernacle in the evil day. If we enter in, we will see how well it is with those who shelter there. If we can no longer pray, we can still sigh, still groan; if we can no longer sigh, we can still take comfort. Another prays, another sighs and groans for us. "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward." The Saviour of the Canaanitish woman still lives: "For a small moment has he forsaken thee; but with great mercies will he gather thee. In a little wrath he hid his face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will he have mercy on thee, saith the Lord, thy Redeemer."

If we have passed safely through one trial, we will be judged worthy to endure another. It is always a sign that the Lord is dealing with us

when such is our experience. Look again at the woman of Canaan. Jesus is now about to answer her, but His answer looks quite like a decided refusal of her request. "I am not sent," He says, "but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Therefore not sent to thee, unfortunate Syrophenician, who art "an alien from the commonwealth of Israel, a stranger from the covenant of promise." He whom thou criest after leaves thee "without hope and without God in the world."

This is what the Canaanitish woman might have concluded—this is what we often tacitly say to ourselves in our dark hour of extreme trial, when it seems as though there were an abyss between our Saviour's words and ourselves.

For this second trial, too, has a general character. It embraces all those situations in which we are authorised to lay hold upon the promise of Christ, when it seems as though He had come for others indeed, but had not come for ourselves individually. We have our Bible before us, filled with wholesome and encouraging truths. We admit that this Bible is indeed the word of God, but none of its declarations produce any effect; we cannot appropriate an iota of their comfort.

We think that we are not sufficiently convinced of sin, sufficiently repentant, sufficiently prepared for Jesus. We lose ourselves in a host of scruples, and these scruples are a new snare and delusion of the "old man, which is corrupt." We take them for humility, but at bottom they are nothing but self-righteousness. Before having recourse to gratuitous salvation in the full sense of the word, we seek to fit ourselves as it were for the Lord, but the more we labour to do this the less we succeed. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" Or else, finding ourselves unsuccessful in this attempt, we set about another. We institute comparisons, we look right and left for "the lost sheep of the house of Israel." We say, Were I but like such a one then I might be happy, then I too could appropriate all the consolations that I required. We cite as examples all those whom we consider more advanced Christians than ourselves, and we say to our hearts that when once we have attained their moral excellence we shall be able to believe as firmly as they, and shall be entitled to consider ourselves also within the fold of Christ. That is to say, we are prepared to believe in a Saviour when we have no

need of one; we purpose to claim His promises as soon as we have provided sufficiently for ourselves. What a perversion! To make Jesus the Healer of those who are well, when He is come "to seek and to save that which is lost;" to wait till we are prepared, till we are quickened, while "He hath life in Himself, and will not give His glory to another!" What does all this superiority of those who are cited as Christ's chosen sheep really amount to? There is no difference: "for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." The most thoroughly converted will be the first to acknowledge his nothingness. If he has "laboured more abundantly than you all," it is "not he, but the grace of God that is in him," and this grace is made "perfect in weakness." Let us then not attempt to change parts; but give ourselves such as we are to Christ, and He will teach us that which He would have us to be. There is no abyss, there is an open way between us and Him. The woman of Canaan says to herself, He is here for me, and I am here for Him. She makes sure of the Lord, so should we make sure too of the promises. We should throw away our fears and scruples, and the words of Christ

will come home to us. Oh, my soul, enlarge thine heart, and put away all those cares, those calculations, those doubts! "Sing, O barren souls, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing. . . . Enlarge the place of thy tent, and stretch forth the curtains of thine habitation: lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes." Oh, know at length "the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge." When, indeed, is it we hope to know it? Is it to be so soon as all shall go well, so soon as we have power in ourselves to help ourselves? Ah, believe me, our normal state is one of "fightings without and fears within." There must be difficulties, nay, impossibilities, material and spiritual, that Jesus may be glorified, that His grace may be sufficient for us. We are not here admiring the Syrophenician, we are admiring that grace which is always victorious. It is this grace that prevails, it is not us; it is this grace that opens to us the fold for lost sheep, and if it shuts, who can open? if it opens, who can shut? Let us not heed our own surmises, but lay hold in full assurance of hope of the offered blessing. After having believed in spite of our feelings, let us believe in spite of our scruples. We shall see how strong this will make us—

we see it already in the example of this woman. If she interpret favourably language that seems against her, this is because she is clinging to Jesus and will not let Him go. Though He slay her, yet will she hope in Him. If we do the same, we will be within an inch of final triumph. And yet not so. Not just yet, at all events.

A third trial remains, and it is the hardest of all. Jesus speaks again. Is He about to comply with her request? No; He adds harsher words even than He spoke before: "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." Here is contempt cast upon the poor petitioner indeed! She is to be made to feel her unworthiness. Jesus Christ now resembles a Judge rather than a Saviour. This, too, is a general experience, and comes to pass when Christ places us in presence of our real selves, and awakens within us the consciousness of sin. Sin has a crushing weight, and there are seasons of such complete prostration beneath its burden that we lose sight of grace, seasons when our "iniquities take hold of us," when they are "more in number than the hairs of our head," and our heart fails us.

Our greatest trial at this time is the terror inspired by our own unworthiness; but we must now triumph over our consciences, as we have triumphed over our feelings and our scruples. The consciousness of sin has many different ways of making itself felt. There are men in which it has never as yet wakened, in which it will only waken too late. Others resemble invalids afflicted with some internal and latent malady, who are always uncomfortable and uneasy without knowing why. It is sin that gnaws their vitals, but they resolutely shut their eyes to the fact, and will not bear to hear it spoken of. In other cases, again, this consciousness assumes a quite other form. It is one special remorse, enduring throughout a lifetime. There are painful memories of this nature which may indeed allow you intervals of ease, but which seize hold of us ever and anon as a worm that dieth not, as a fire that cannot be quenched. But the true saving consciousness of sin is something more general than this. It begins in us when our whole nature is reviewed in the light of God's Word. There are moments when, without having committed any fresh sin, our own personality suddenly becomes to us an

object of loathing. Jesus Christ has, for the most sincere Christian, dispensations that crush him, which make him feel as though he had to do only with a Judge,—as though the Saviour, the real Jesus, had disappeared. Nevertheless, the woman of Canaan holds fast her faith; her heart, indeed, condemns her, but there is here One that is greater than her heart. She knows well that sin abounds, but she knows also that grace yet more abounds. She replies, "Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table." She discerns a "hope that maketh not ashamed," a "mercy that rejoiceth against judgment." Whatever conscience may urge, Jesus Christ is not a Judge. He came not "to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved." We should not lose sight of that "fountain opened for sin and uncleanness," and say when it is that we most need its cleansing flow. Is it when all goes well, when we can congratulate ourselves on the progress we have made in Christian excellences? Rather let us give thanks when we have at last recognised ourselves as indeed the "chiefest of sinners;" it is then alone that we will be able to say, "For this cause

I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should believe on Him to life everlasting."

And here the trial ends—the trial which was but for a season—which was expedient, salutary. What follows is blessing, honour, glory. When Jesus Christ turns, He says to the woman, "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour."

It is then true, that according to our faith so is it with us as well as with her. If we do not believe, we see no miracles wrought; if we believe but little, we see few miracles; if we believe continually, we see continual miracles. And it is a small thing for our faith to overcome the world; it does more: it gives us the victory over ourselves as well, the victory over our feelings, our scruples, and even over our consciences. When is it that we are masters of all the contingences of our old nature? It is when we can hope against hope. The true soldier needs the battle, the true sailor the tempest, the true Chris-

tian a darkened world. Thus it was this woman of Canaan had had her character formed; all the way she was led had been marked out by Love. Oh, let us remember this poor heathen when we desire anything else than a narrow road, a clouded future, a life of struggle. Our great gain is to follow Jesus,—to-day in His humiliation, to-morrow in His glory. True, "His way is in the sea, and His paths in the great waters;" but wherefore look, or be discouraged at the way? Our safety and our confidence are in our Guide. "Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God," and, as such, He "is the hope of glory." We should go forward, then, with Him,—submitting ourselves to His discipline, and He will "keep us from falling, and present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy."

VII.

SEPARATION

JOHN xi. 1-45.

" Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha," &c., &c. [Read to the 45th verse.]

VII.

THE history of the family at Bethany is that of a separation. There comes one sad and sorrowful hour in family life, the hour in which we have to say farewell. Here we have brought before us three thoroughly united and happy souls, two sisters and one brother, all living beneath the same roof, and all three knowing the Lord. Now, when we are thus accustomed to live together day by day, we are too apt to overlook the possibility of ever being separated. Nevertheless, death spares no one; and often those whom we for our own parts love best, God loves best also. The pet lamb is generally the first to go. The happy home at Bethany is about to be transformed into a house of mourning. Lazarus falls sick; the prayers, the tender nursing of the sisters, cannot arrest death; the icy hand is stretched forth, and only a corpse remains to them. Probably brother and sisters had often spoken to each other about death; of an evening,

perhaps, they had more than once in their domestic intimacy discussed which was likely to be called away earliest, and now they are answered. We all know what it is to lose some one dear to us, perhaps the dearest upon earth. The house we inhabit, nay all life itself, becomes a solitude; every place recalls memories that make the tears to flow. We still feel as though we were in a painful and perplexing dream, so impossible is it to be reconciled to the thought: I shall then never look on him or her any more! But yet for all this, if there is a true saying in the whole Bible, it is the saying, "God is love."

Yes, around this severest of trials there are countless mercies intertwined, and countless blessings are reserved for broken hearts. It is not said without cause that we ought to glory in afflictions, and to take them joyfully. Place a grain of sand beside some lofty mountain, will we still be able to discover that grain? Well, then, let us contrast with the blow that has just fallen upon us the unsearchable riches of Christ. Is there any proportion between the two? We see what the Saviour was to these two sisters, and Christ is still the same towards all those who seek Him. To know Jesus

Christ's eternal power, we must take our stand near a tomb. It is not our sorrows that deprive us of Him, but our false props and consolations. Let us look a little more closely at this visitation of the family at Bethany. There are many and various experiences of the heart before, during, and after a separation, and it is on these phases of sorrow that we are about to meditate. What must the two sisters have felt during the sickness of Lazarus? What took place within them when the hand of death laid him low, and what effect did the trial have upon the life of Martha and Mary? The history will answer all these questions.

"Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus."

Let us suppose ourselves in the place of the two sisters at the moment when Lazarus fell sick. But yesterday, the three were well, they were happy, they could not have imagined life going on differently, and to-day everything is changed already. A cloud has risen on the family horizon, and in that cloud death lurks. It seems that Lazarus' sickness soon assumed a formidable character, and that the sisters must have whispered to each other the dread words, "What if it should be fatal?" In

their terror, "They sent unto Jesus, saying, Lord, behold he whom thou lovest is sick!" But for all that, "Jesus abode two days still in the same place where He was." Is this not what the Lord does still at the present day? He is often so far from us when we seek Him! we get so little strength from our sighs and prayers! we have some secret fear, we lay it before the Lord, and yet that fear is not taken away! we would fain constrain the Lord to abide with us, and it seems as though He were still two days' journey off! our mind is so disturbed that prayer becomes almost impossible. Alas! so little is needed to disturb our souls and unfit them for spiritual communion! But indeed there is nothing so agonising as this conflict of hope and fear. This suspense throws us into a state of agitation, and agitation prevents prayer. Perhaps one has moments when strength seems to have been given, and then we seek to encourage ourselves by saying, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Put thy trust in God, for I shall yet give him thanks who is the health of my countenance, and my God." But a few moments later the former overwhelming depressions return, and all our

labour seems to have been in vain. Why is it that in these terrible seasons of visitation our prayers are so barren of result? If we examine closely, we shall discover three reasons. First of all there is too much tumult in the soul. God is not a God of confusion, but of peace; "wait patiently for the Lord," and He will incline His ear to us and will hear our cry. Secondly, there is too much obstinacy of will. We try to carry things with a high hand, instead of surrendering ourselves to God as children. Be sure that His will is better than ours, and that we will find it for our profit to submit ourselves to it. Lastly, there is too much incredulity. We keep looking at outward circumstances, or listening to the melancholy forebodings of our own hearts, but it is not there that the truth is to be found: "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, she may forget, yet will I not forget thee, saith the Lord." Believe; that is far better than to weaken ourselves by lamentation. Poor as our prayers may be, they are not lost; there is a blessing reserved for every struggling soul. We are sustained without knowing it, Jesus Christ is on His way towards us, and we are about

to know Him as the One to whom all power is given in heaven and earth. In all our afflictions He is afflicted, and He will be exalted in showing mercy to us. Let us look once more at Martha and Mary. Jesus Christ does not indeed come to them during their brother's illness, but as soon as death has struck its blow, we see Him beside the weeping sisters.

We have seen what passes within the heart when the trial is impending—let us notice what happens when the trial has come to pass.

If we were told beforehand the griefs that await us in our way through life, we should often believe it impossible to endure them. We would rather die at once, rather never have been born, than doomed to be plunged into such abysses of woe. But be sure that all is divinely ordered, "for he will not lay upon man more than right, that he should enter into judgment with God." "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tried above that ye are able, but will with the trial also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear." We see how Martha and Mary are supported in the most sorrowful day of their lives.

By the side of the tomb of Lazarus Jesus stands in person ; and if the two watchers had had to choose between their brother and their Saviour, would they have hesitated? The illness as well as the death of Lazarus was "for the glory of God, that the Son of man might be glorified thereby." We see only the mourning and the loss, but those who are smitten find themselves in presence of the Lord's compassion. "Jesus wept," and this was at the grave of Lazarus. The Saviour has a sympathy that no Christian fellowship can afford. The house of the two sisters was crowded with friends, each of whom would fain prove a comforter, but human comforters only distract. One has to listen to and answer them, and, to a poor broken spirit, it is not this that is wanted. No, it is silence that it wants, and in that silence the message brought, "The Master is come, and calleth for thee." A soul that is left alone with the Lord is supremely rich, is no longer to be pitied. It understands the intention of the Master, and says to itself, He would have me all His own ; He has broken in pieces my earthly possessions, because they and the affections they inspired could not suffice me. He has reserved "some better

thing for me," and that which has hitherto deprived me of this chief treasure has been my divided heart. Yes, we feel, in an hour like this, that to give is to receive,—ay, to receive an hundredfold. Family love and joy, Christian sympathisers, oh, ye are much indeed; and yet what are you when "the Master is come, and calleth for us!" If we look steadfastly into that tomb, we will see there "the resurrection and the life," and how narrow the barrier that divides us from it. "Said I not unto thee,"—thus spake Jesus to Martha—"that if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?" We are so often mistaken as to the true source of our tears. We believe that our sorrows spring from our losses, and they only spring from our want of faith. We dream that our life would be again beautiful and complete, if the Saviour would but cry aloud into that tomb to which we point Him, "Lazarus, come forth!" But suppose that Jesus Christ were to do so, to restore us those we are weeping for, and to say to us, Live together twenty, fifty, a hundred years under the same roof, would we have received the boon we need? To live together,—but on the earth, with all the germs of sin within, and under the

weight of this tabernacle in which we groan,—is this our destination? And if some one among us outruns us, enters before us into glory, would we retain or recall him? The true joy of Martha and Mary lies, not in Lazarus coming forth out of the tomb only to return thither after a season, but in the promise, "I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." The great miracle is not that a dead man should "hear the voice of the Son of God;" it is that Jesus Christ himself, "the Prince of Life," should have laid Him down in the arms of death, that "He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject unto bondage." The foundation of our hope is faith in Him who hath "raised up from the dead our Lord Jesus," who was delivered for our offences, and raised up again for our justification. And when is it we most thank God that He hath, by the resurrection of His Son, given us this lively hope? It is surely when we stand before an open grave, and see our own beside it. True, we must

know what it is to "groan in spirit," as Jesus did, over the consequences of sin, to rejoice adequately in "the inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved for us." Martha and Mary had only the earnest of that inheritance; and we, too, who have received the first-fruits of the Spirit, we know well that "it doth not yet appear what we shall be," but "that for which we hope," we do "with patience wait for." Our separations give new wings to our hopes; we know whither we are going, and no longer ask, with Thomas, "How can we know the way?" Thus the parting which made us so tremble when it was impending, wears a different aspect when once it has come to pass. There is made "a path in the great waters," and "the depths of the sea are a way for the ransomed to pass over." If we ask the two sisters, they will reply, "Neither death, nor life, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

But now what character will Christian life assume when the trial is over? This is the third phase of our subject.

Nothing more beautiful than a holy sorrow. When God inflicts His great blows, it is to bring about His highest purposes. But we may say with regard to the majority of men, "The Lord hath stricken them, but they have not grieved; hath consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction; they have made their faces harder than a rock, they have refused to return." There are many whose tears flow readily, and who, beside a new-made grave, give themselves up to absolute despair; and yet these are often the very men who console themselves most readily. Others nurse their grief, and absorb themselves so in their memories of the past that they become, as it were, barren fig-trees cumbering the ground. Others again, in the midst of their resolute gloom, nourish a certain bitterness. If they could get on without a God, they would break with Him altogether in the very churchyard where He has laid their treasure low. There is also a philosophy which is that of despair, not indeed of that furious despair that prompts to suicide, but of that calm despair which is still able to reason and calculate. This is the condition of those who, having devoted their whole life to the worship of an idol, have seen their hopes vanish,

and from that moment have renounced all fresh pursuits and hopes altogether. Indifferent and contemptuous, they look on at the course of human events without sympathy or interest, and all that they retain of their former life is a bitter irony. In short, if we look round the world, search into the history of trials, and see what effect they have on the morrow, we will acknowledge that, of all God's means of grace, these are the oftenest wasted and thrown away. The most numerous cases of impenitence and hardness of heart arise from affliction ill-borne, neither the goodness nor the severity of God having led to repentance. But, on the other hand, look what human life becomes when the separations we have endured have really said to our spirits, "The Master is come, and calleth for thee." The man of the world believes life to be no longer worth holding when his cherished idols are taken from him. The tried Christian dates his real life only from the epoch of the trials that led him to God. Jesus became something quite other for Martha and Mary after they had experienced His power beside their brother's tomb. A little later, we find the Saviour once more at Bethany, and the two sisters, we are told by St John, "made him a sup-

per, and Martha served. Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair, and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment." Have we, in looking back, the memory of a parting that wrung our hearts, and has Jesus sanctified to us the trial? Then we know to whom we belong, and we live no longer to ourselves, but "unto Him who loved us and gave Himself for us." This costly ointment, this odour that fills the whole house, is the emblem of a Christianity that owes its living fragrance to some sorrow vivified by Jesus. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." Thus prepared, we will be able to say, with Jesus, "Are there not twelve hours in the day?" and have I not got to redeem this flying time? Since I am here for so brief a period, should I not hearken to the voice that speaks to me: "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand?" Instead of burying ourselves in fruitless regrets, we will walk while it is day, and our last works shall be better than our first.

Yes, it is indeed a new existence which the man

leads who is ever accompanied on his way by some trial turned into a blessing. He has become acquainted with Jesus beside a tomb, and henceforth he "looks not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are unseen." The Saviour has made those chains fall off which his own hands never could have loosened. The happiest heart is the most detached, the most free—for "a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." Let us be thankful if Jesus comes to our aid by throwing open His sanctuary. We will find that we have lost nothing when we shall have come to possess all good things in the one supreme God. We will be freed from anxiety and agitation, and will enter into the "rest that remaineth for the people of God." Jesus, who has been praying for us, will once more cry, "Father, I thank thee that thou hearest me always." He who raised up Lazarus is the same who has raised our Christian joy from the dust. The withered heart is refreshed by a "hope that maketh not ashamed." It has found "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." The world may indeed pity us, our outward state may seem impoverished and shattered, and all the

while we are like "a green olive tree in the house of God," and "our trust is in the tender mercy of God from this time forth and for ever."

One thought more. Jesus Christ has said, "Every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt." We have seen in the history upon which we have been meditating of what *salt* and of what *sacrifice* He spoke. It remains that we examine ourselves as to the character of our own individual Christianity. What is most wanting in our days is salt from above, and bodies that offer themselves "as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable unto God." If this be our case, then we need fear not though the Lord visit us—it is but to quicken and renew our faith, to prevent our silver becoming dross, our fine gold dim. Appearances will not suffice. What we need is reality, and there is no reality except the power of God. It is this power which enters into our anguish, our mourning, and takes from death its sting and the grave its victory. What we to-day call a loss, a separation, to-morrow we will call a crown in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of our God. There is a spring-time

for flowers, there is for broken spirits an eternal youth. If we shake off the dust of the world, we will find beneath it robes of light, and the Prince of Life shall clothe us therein. Only let us give ourselves unto Him, "He is our strength and our Redeemer." Under all circumstances, "the voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacles of the righteous: the right hand of the Lord doeth valiantly."

VIII.

BROKEN CHAINS.

MATTHEW viii. 28-34.

"And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way. And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time? And there was a good way off from them an herd of many swine feeding. So the devils besought him, saying, If thou cast us out, suffer us to go away into the herd of swine. And he said unto them, Go. And when they were come out, they went into the herd of swine; and, behold, the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters. And they that kept them fled, and went their ways into the city, and told every thing, and what was befallen to the possessed of the devils. And, behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw him, they besought him that he would depart out of their coasts."

VIII.

THERE are certain difficulties in this narrative which it is desirable that we should, at the outset, seek to make plain to ourselves. First of all, who were these Gergesenes, or, as they are elsewhere called, Gadarenes? Were they a Jewish or a heathen population?

We find them keeping herds of swine, which was a thing forbidden by the Mosaic law, and this might lead us to infer that these Gergesenes were heathens. But, on the other hand, we read at the end of the narrative of the whole city coming out to meet Jesus, and humbly requesting Him to depart out of their coasts. This petition of the Gergesenes, succeeding to the loss of their swine, plainly shows us that the consciences of these people were not at ease. Had they been heathens, they would openly have driven the Saviour away; but the moderation they evince, and the silence they preserve at the loss they have just sustained,

are very significant. These people remind us of certain would-be smugglers whose prohibited goods have been seized, and who do not dare to complain. Apparently these Gergesenes were Jews by race, who, living upon the borders of a heathen country, had gradually lost their respect for the law of their fathers. Jesus Christ had come to bring them salvation, but their hearts were tied and bound by material interests, and their illegal traffic was dearer to them than the good of their souls; they sacrifice the Son of God to herds of swine!

Here is another point that demands our investigation. The narrative treats of two demoniacs, the name given by the evangelist to men in whom demons abode—sometimes one, sometimes more, sometimes even a whole legion. Now, how, we ask, was such a cohabitation as this possible? Many have sought to evade the difficulty by viewing these demoniacs as epileptic sufferers, or lunatics, such as we see in our day; but neither of these conditions corresponds with the description given by the evangelists. They evidently speak of demons who had taken forcible possession of the bodies of these unfortunates, who no longer al-

lowed them free agency, but actually *cast* them into the fire or the water, and grievously tormented them.

The sacred writers, we observe, distinguish between the demons who spoke within the person possessed and the possessed himself, and this distinction is made in the narrative. First of all, we have the demoniacs themselves crying out, "What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?" Then, a few moments later, we have the demons themselves, who speak, and pray the Saviour, if He cast them out, to suffer them to enter into the herd of swine. How can such an indwelling of demons in human bodies be possible? There is one passage which is of itself sufficient to settle this question. Is it not written of Judas, that "after the sop Satan entered into him?" Man is created for a master, and if this master be no longer God, it is the devil; and when once the devil has taken possession of the internal citadel, he has got possession of the body as well, for it is the soul that rules the body; since "to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey;

whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness." Man has liberty of choice given him: he may give himself up to God or up to sin; but he that "committeth sin is of the devil, for the devil sinneth from the beginning." Therefore "resist the devil, and he will flee from you," else his empire and his influence will continue till "both soul and body are cast into hell."

Lastly, we may inquire, with some perplexity, why was it that the devils desired to enter the swine, and how was it that Jesus Christ permitted the destruction of those animals—He who is so merciful to all the works of His hands, and careth for man and beast? It has been argued, in reply, that the devil being the most carnal of all creatures, swine were the most fitting habitation for him; but there is another and a better reason to be given. The demons desired to drown those swine, because they foresaw that the Gergesenes, irritated at losing them, would send the Saviour out of their coasts, and that therefore He could no more work miracles among them. Satanic intention! Wherever there are bodies to be destroyed, and souls to be kept at a distance from Christ, Satan has always the same end in view. As to the

drowned swine, what more hardship was there in this fate than in the ravages of an epidemic disease? we might just as well inquire why myriads of men are mown down by war, plague, cholera. God is the Lord of the living and the dead—the one Lawgiver who killeth and maketh alive. And in this case we have not the destruction of human creatures to deplore—it is only swine that perish in the waters. And is the cure of two souls bought too dear by the death of a few animals? Immediately after their destruction, we find the two demoniacs healed; they have found peace, and we behold them seated happily at the feet of Jesus. The loss of the herd had also a wholesome significance for the Gergesenes. While weaning them thus from their unlawful practice, the Saviour designs at the same time to teach them self-knowledge, and to make them clearly understand that unfair gains never profit.

Having made these preliminary observations, let us proceed to meditate upon the narrative as a whole. We see in it, indeed, how the devil can take captive a poor individual soul,—nay, how he can influence a whole district,—but we also see

that the Son of God has appeared to "destroy the works of the devil." Satan cannot even touch one of the herd of swine without permission given by the Lord. This fact has two sides: the one is dark, the other light. On the one hand, we have chains forged for a single soul, or flung over a whole country; on the other hand, we see those chains broken and the captives loosed; for "if the Son of God shall make you free, then are ye free indeed." The saddest spectacle in the world is a soul in chains. By this we understand a soul who no longer has possession of itself, who can no more do the things it would, but is in every way tied and bound by evil; and if the soul be so bound, the body is so too, for the body is but the instrument of the soul.

Hence it is that there are so many "members servants to uncleanness, and to iniquity unto iniquity,"—so many throats that are open sepulchres, tongues that use deceit, lips that have the poison of asps under them, mouths full of cursing and bitterness, feet swift to shed blood, and such destruction and misery in all their ways. Here daily experience comes to the support of the gospel. If we let ourselves be enslaved by a bad habit,

before long we will have lost our self-control, our free agency; we will be, in a manner, men possessed. Satan seizes us by a single hair to-day; if we submit to him, to-morrow his grasp will be laid on our whole person, and we will no longer be able to escape from his toils. Let us beware of the snare of the fowler, and the noisome pestilence; of the terror by night, and of the arrow that flieth by day,—of the pestilence that walketh in darkness, and of the destruction that wasteth at noonday. We should resist from the very commencement, and then we will never be entangled into bondage. But this is what we too much neglect; we are not careful to watch ourselves closely. Sin invariably begins by trifles, but these trifles soon become heavy chains, and, because we did not crush the egg, the serpent appears. If we take, for example, the drunkard, the gambler, the libertine, the idler,—they are men whose bodies are no longer their own,—and how did they begin their career? By small sins, and now the consequences are beyond their own power. Sin is of the nature of leaven—it leavens the whole lump; the evil, once set working, does not stop. If the whole spirit and soul and body be not sanc-

tified wholly, they become thoroughly perverted. There is no middle course. The conflict between good and evil may for a long while be undecided, but one or other must ultimately prevail, and evil is more rapid in its development than good. Who has not seen a man whose chains have grown stronger and stronger, and whose heart has got so hardened that he has become incapable of attempting to break them?

And we should not suppose that it is only into public-houses, gambling-saloons, and discreditable houses that the devil makes his way; he enters also into churches, prosperous homes—nay, into the very closets where we ought to pray! Why is it that he transforms himself into an angel of light? That he may mislead the refined, cultivated, respectable classes. Just as the air penetrates every place, so does the influence of the evil one—it is everywhere. It is not any given locality that can save us, but watching and prayer. "Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear." "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall;" "for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high

places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God." Again, just as Satan can bind one individual soul, so too can he bind a whole family—a whole country. Are there not families where the gospel finds gates of brass and bars of iron closed against its reception? Why is this? Why, but because these families are bound in chains—some of interest, some of self-righteousness, some of passions indulged; for what the devil does on a small scale he can also do on a larger, as we see exemplified in the case of the Gadarenes. Here we have a whole district enslaved by mammon-worship—not a single soul that is drawn towards Christ; they prefer their herds of swine to "the fulness of the Godhead bodily!" And in our own day, are similar cases any rarity? Take Spain, Italy,—nay, take more than one Protestant country,—are there not any strongholds of irreligion to be found there? There, too, there are watchmen that mount the walls, and rest not day nor night, but this is to keep truth at bay; the language held is, "We will not have this man to reign over us!" Satan has his fortified places as God has His, and a supernatural strength is needed to cause the light to shine in that darkness. But is this because God

wills this state of things? Ah, we should beware of imputing to Him what proceeds entirely from man. If we were to penetrate into this darkness, into these cases of protracted hardening, we would see that it is always man himself who has stretched out his hands to the evil one. He has let himself be "drawn away of his own lust, and enticed;" he has "loved darkness rather than light." Thus it is that the sinner grows hardened, and by that "hardness and impenitent heart treasures up unto himself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God."

Nevertheless, let us despair of no one—our subject has a bright and hopeful side as well as a dark one. Who would have supposed that those two demoniacs, who seemed the most pitiably enslaved of all the Gadarenes, could be freed from their chains, and made the disciples of the Lord? Two possessed men, the scourge of the whole country, so exceeding fierce that no one could tame them, these Jesus will turn into two lambs, "to the praise of the glory of His grace." "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh

from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils." We have seen who the strong man is; let us now contemplate the stronger than he, even the "Son of God, who came to destroy the works of the devil."

Jesus Christ has Himself declared that He was sent "to preach deliverance to the captives, to set at liberty them that are bound." If, then, Jesus Christ be but in us, "greater is He that is in us, than he that is in the world." How, then, let us now inquire, does the Saviour accomplish His work of liberation?

The two demoniacs were, in the first instance of one accord with the demons. When Jesus Christ approached them, they began to cry out, "What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?" This was the language of the men possessed, it must be remembered,—not of the possessing demons. These unfortunates were closely united to, were of one mind with the evil spirits. Now, whenever Jesus Christ draws nigh to a soul in captivity, He comes bringing a sword, and this sword it is which "pierces even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and

marrow," and then comes division. A soul thus encountered begins to feel, and say, There is something within me which is not me, something which cometh of evil. Then there will be separation where before there had been identity, aversion where there had been full consent, conflict where all was at rest. Then there is discovered to exist in the flesh a "wrestling against the spirit, a law of sin in the members," as well as a law in the inward man—a force that subdues us and incites to evil, against which the first sighs for deliverance begin to rise. The soul now knows itself, awakes at last from its long slumber. But this poor soul can only shake her chains; she cannot, alas! break them and fling them away. For to will is indeed present with her, but how to perform she knows not. There is but the Son of God who can make us free indeed. Now, that which keeps us still away from Him is fear. The two demoniacs evidently tremble at the approach of Christ; for they exclaim, "Art thou come to torment us before the time?" When the devil sees a soul is awaking, and fears to lose it, he fills that soul with false terrors, as before he had filled it with false security; and where fear exists love is not possible,

for love produces confidence. Nevertheless, whenever Jesus Christ begins a good work, He will perform it unto the end; when He drives the devil away, He will banish the spirit of bondage and fear as well. Another influence now begins to make itself felt, which is no longer of the law, but of grace; just as there is a period of twilight which precedes the morning, so, too, there is a dawn before the rising of the Sun of righteousness. This dawn is the presentiment of a "peace that passeth understanding." When the prodigal son was still a great way off, his father's arms were already opened wide to embrace him.

The soul which has come to itself, which Divine grace has savingly touched, is gently drawn on and on by cords of love. Such was the miracle Jesus wrought in the case of the two that were possessed with devils. Discord and division arose in their hearts between the captive and the captors; from a condition of terror, which springs from the awakening of the conscience, they passed to a state of confidence, the result of "the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus," which makes "free from the law of sin and death." We are able to appropriate to ourselves the blessing of peace, when

once that mysterious bond is formed to which we give the name of faith. These two men are about to become vessels of Divine love, as formerly they had been vessels of wrath. They are delivered from the power of darkness, and transplanted into the kingdom of God's dear Son. Contemplating from afar the destruction of the herd of swine, they discover that Satan's influence is no longer within their own spirit; they witness its external action, and shudder at it. They are henceforth to be one with Christ, as they had been one with their fearful indwelling tyrants, and they are comforted. They will thankfully hold their members to obedience unto righteousness; they will become the servants of God, and have their fruit unto holiness.

But, alas! it is not so with the other Gergesenes. Instead of welcoming the Saviour, they dismiss Him, not indeed by open violence, but by beseeching Him to "depart out of their coasts." They would rather keep their present chains than become prisoners of Christ. This is the case with a worldly heart; it shrinks with horror from the gospel, so soon as the gospel demands sacrifices. But

this horror is kept concealed; the aim is to dismiss Jesus Christ with all formal propriety, and not to provoke any open rupture. Worldliness, therefore, is entitled prudence, and genuine Christianity passes for fanaticism. Later, perhaps, Jesus Christ may be permitted to return, when material interests are less pressing; or later, perhaps, some concessions may even be made to Him. Ah, it is too true, many subterfuges suggest themselves when there comes the need for renunciation—for following Jesus in the path of self-denial. This Gadarene population resembles the semi-Christians amongst us. They dare not, indeed, openly deny the Saviour; but, for all that, they will not allow Him to go on drowning their herds of swine. A compromise is attempted as long as possible; but at length the hour of decision must strike. Jesus is set for our rising or our falling; if we are not with Him, we are against Him. Oh, let us be cold or hot, for we know the doom of the lukewarm.

But between the two healed demoniacs and the Gergesene population, our narrative shows a third class of men—those that kept the swine. These herdsmen are witnesses to the miracle wrought in

favour of the possessed of devils; they admire the power of Jesus, and, running into the city, they tell everything that has happened. But it is not said that those who kept the swine were themselves converted. This class of men is still to be found in our day. They are the admirers of Christianity indeed, but for all that they do not themselves make use of its provisions. They see the influence of the gospel in heathen as well as in Christian doctrine; they are the apologists of Christ, and of all dogmatic Christianity; but, nevertheless, they are only fluent advocates, eloquent speakers —their religion has no root. Now, Christianity is something more than a demonstration in words; it is an actual process carried on within the heart: demons have to be chased away, swine have to be drowned. But these men prefer admiring to embracing, theorising to renouncing—witnessing the conversion of others to being themselves converted. The fact is, they are still bound, and yet they do not choose to admit the existence of their chains. Christ's truth makes free; where it has not yet had this result, it is not as yet known. But "whosoever is of the truth heareth His voice." There are souls that begin to

be shaken, and to sigh after a change; they understand their state, and their chains are about to fall.

For whose sake, then, is this narrative recorded? For those who are still bound. Will they remain in this condition when they may have a deliverer, and have him gratuitously? Are they happy when they are fettered, happy when they are only half-free? I do not inquire what it is that still keeps them captive; be it by a single hair or a chain of iron that they are held, that hair as well as that chain can subserve Satan's purposes. Nothing is small that concerns peace, and it takes so little to disturb it fatally; they should look things fairly in the face, and not put off till the morrow; there are inveterate miseries that spring from want of resolution, half purposes. Let them throw themselves, bound as they are, into the arms of Jesus. He has been bound for them, He knows how much they suffer. Oh that we would open our hearts to trust and confidence, that His "strength might be made perfect in our weakness." Had we looked at the two demoniacs, would you have had any hope at all of them? Well, then, the Son of God is still the same. *We* are now the captives to whom deliverance is to be announced, the

prisoners whose bands are to be loosed. If we believe first of all what Christ has done *for* us, we we shall see what He will do *in* us. Let us not invert that order. Instead of beginning by a series of painful efforts to render ourselves, as we suppose, more worthy of being the subjects of deliverance, we should take our stand beneath the cross of Calvary. There we will see that what we would now do, has been done already, that all is fulfilled. Principalities and powers have been openly spoiled; our sins, our chains,—Christ has triumphed over them all on the cross. Is there one enemy that the Saviour has not conquered, one unclean spirit that is not put under His feet? Our "soul is escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowler, the snare is broken, and we are delivered." And we may be sure that what Christ has done *for* us He will also do *in* us. The faith that justifies will also sanctify. We should stand fast, therefore, in the liberty with which Christ has made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. The sooner we realise that our chains are actually broken, the more easily they will drop off. The spirit of fear will yield to a child's confident joy, and where there is joy there is life, deliverance,

liberty. We shall "chase a host," we shall "leap over a wall," for our cause is the cause of Christ, and he that "toucheth us toucheth the apple of His eye." Is this saying too much? is this language mere hyperbole? Not so, for it is the word of God which endureth for ever, and nothing can be done against the truth but only for the truth. If we continue in this doctrine, we will be disciples indeed; "we will know the truth, and the truth shall make us free."

IX.

STAGES IN CONVERSION.

JOHN iv. 4–42.

"And he must needs go through Samaria. Then cometh he to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph," &c., &c. [Read to ver. 42.]

IX.

THE history of the woman of Samaria is the history of a conversion. It was one of those conversions wrought without human agency by the Lord himself. "His disciples were gone unto the city," while Jesus Christ was speaking to this Samaritan; which shows us that the servants of Christ are often far away when the Lord speaks savingly to a soul, for He needs not any aid of ours, and it is only a matter of favour when He condescends to use us as His instruments. Now, in conversion there are three separate stages to be noticed. The work begins by the operation of prevenient grace. "No man can come unto me," says Christ, "except the Father who hath sent me draw him." This primary operation leads to a general rousing up of the conscience. "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." If these two conditions be fulfilled, there will be also a change of character and of

conduct; the "good tree will bring forth good fruit." The possessor of the treasure will display his new-found wealth; "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." Now, it is this threefold work in the conversion of the woman of Samaria which we proceed to meditate upon. God has indeed different ways of converting His people, but for each and all of them alike the gate is strait, and provided we have entered in by the one saving entrance, we shall be sure to meet in the narrow way. We will, then, follow this woman through these three successive stages, and inquire how far divine grace has penetrated into our own individual life.

We find the Saviour at the entrance of a town of Samaria called Sychar, and beside a well dug long ago by the patriarch Jacob. It was while He was resting at that well that the Samaritan woman found the Lord of life. She for her part came there daily to draw water for her household needs; but the presence of Jesus at once places her in a position in which she may find something far beyond mere water, if only she know the gifts of God. On looking at that well of Jacob, that terrestrial well, do we

not see in it the image of that sum of vanity from which the children of this world expect to find happiness? If we look at man, what do we find him seeking? Earth, earth always and only. He attempts to quench his thirst by "hewing out broken cisterns which hold no water," and he does not even see the "fountain of living water." The world has deceived and baffled him a thousand times, and yet you cannot detach him from it; he will cry with you to-day, "Vanity of vanities," and when you meet him to-morrow, he will be pursuing vanity still. And often there are situations in life in which it seems well-nigh impossible that such and such a man should not find the Lord; there are so many perplexities in his destiny, so many trials, so many domestic crosses. Jesus is often quite close to some poor soul, and yet that soul neither sees nor desires Him. It will not quit its accustomed track, nor hear the voice that says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." Ah, if we were kept waiting, denied admittance, treated day by day as we treat our Lord, instead of "the riches of goodness and patience and long-suffering," what should we have within our heart but treasures of wrath and indignation!

The woman of Samaria, occupied entirely by the affairs of temporal and material life, was not thinking of the Lord; but He, seeing her on her way, recognised in her at once one of those souls that the Father has directed to the Son, and of whom He has Himself said, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me: and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Accordingly Jesus, looking upon the woman, speaks to her, and says, "Give me to drink." Thus, then, we see the first step towards conversion is taken by Jesus and not by us. "Ye have not chosen me," He tells us, "but I have chosen you." He hath called us by our name; He has made us His while we knew Him not.

What is it that happens when grace begins its work in any of us? We will find ourselves powerfully attracted by some new influence, we will set ourselves to *seek*. The first beams of truth shine into the chaos of fallen nature, and wants are discovered which hitherto had never made themselves felt. This woman marvels how it is that this stranger, who is a Jew, should ask drink of her who is a woman of Samaria. This wonder belongs to a soul that is reached by voices new

and never heard before; but these voices from above are not yet understood. The woman as yet knows not the gift of God, nor who it is who says to her, "Give me to drink." Nevertheless the work is begun, and wherever the divine power has entered it must needs take effect. But we find that a soul that is being operated on by grace is, in the first instance, prone to believe that it can satisfy its new wants by natural means. Jesus Christ had spoken to this Samaritan of *living* water, and she for her part believes that the stranger is about to quench her thirst by the common everyday process. And this holds good in spiritual matters. When a worldly-minded man has experienced the first starts of conviction, his hope is that, with some honest efforts, with a little steady-going perseverance, he shall succeed in changing himself. He does not yet know that "it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy." What says Jesus to the woman of Samaria? "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again." First of all, we run after pleasures, and they deceive us; then we turn to practices, ordinances, and they fail us and disappoint us too. "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst

again." And in this way a soul may go on seeking long, weary itself long in the search, and yet fail to find the peace it seeks for. What is it that is still wanting? The woman of Samaria needs further light thrown upon her own case, her own character, and this light will proceed from an awakening of her conscience. It is to the second stage that preparatory grace now brings her.

This woman had just exclaimed, "Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw." In the same way the cry often goes up, "Lord, open Thy heavens to me, and I will no longer go on perplexing and afflicting myself in this sad world." There is a wish for enjoyment, for outward privileges; but this is not the Lord's purpose. The gate that has to be entered is *strait*, and that strait gate imposes painful necessities. Just let us look at ourselves more closely; there are a thousand things in our characters to judge and to condemn. The Lord goes at once to the conscience, and He always finds the fatal spot which, once touched, awakens the consciousness of sin. The woman is told to call her husband. She hopes to escape by saying, "I have no hus-

band." But the Divine eyes are as flames of fire; the Lord penetrates the evasion, and lays bare all that the Samaritan woman would fain have concealed. A whole life of immorality is brought to view, her conscience is touched, and, no longer able to disguise the truth, she exclaims, "Sir, I see that thou art a prophet."

This is how Jesus Christ awakes the sinner. He pierces through all the outworks, and arrives at the very heart of the life. The respectable man, as well as the thief, has in his past history and in his present character all sorts of things that the Lord can render red as crimson. A mere peccadillo is enough to disaffect and disquiet us with ourselves, if Jesus Christ comes with the sword. It is usually some isolated act that He presses upon the conscience; not so much our sins in general, as some *one* sin; we will not feel ourselves so much sinners throughout, as worthy of condemnation for such or such a cause. The Saviour's attacks are very direct. He probes, He examines, and He invariably discovers some vulnerable spot; He presses the sore, and gives us no longer any rest; to escape is impossible; let us place ourselves beneath the sword, and let the blow

fall upon the old man. The woman of Samaria is struck to the heart, and now she is thoroughly awake.

It is an awful fact the fact of sin. We hide it, cover it up, try all we can to forget it; but there is an invisible hand that is writing it on the wall at the very moment we think least of it. And just as one flash of lightning cleaving the darkness reveals the face of the whole country, so one sin, when Jesus discloses it to us, lays our whole nature bare to our view.

What next will this Samaritan do? She will learn to pray. Is it on this mountain, or at Jerusalem, that men ought to worship, and that Jesus may be found? Christ makes her understand that God is a Spirit, and that the essential point is to worship in spirit and in truth.

Here are fresh lights for the awakened woman. When once conscience is thoroughly roused, a reform goes on in the matter of prayer also. "Ye worship," says Jesus, "ye know not what." The God of the unawakened soul is a vague idea merely. One may go on praying a long time thus without any result whatever. Be it on the mountain or at Jerusalem, in church or chapel, it is the

same fallen nature that one carries about to them all, and which can never attain to God. But in communion with Jesus this nature becomes changed: spiritual insight takes the place of carnal blindness; when conscience expands, the world of prayer opens out also; one help comes after another; when God bestows one grace, He bestows all.

And what a revolution takes place in life when at length prayer becomes a reality! To-day it is nothing but a barren practice; to-morrow it grasps the hand that holds all the treasures of God. From a poor and paltry routine it becomes the living means of communication with the Almighty. Why should any of us worship without knowledge, seeing that salvation may come to all? The answer is a simple one: there is no breach as yet in the conscience; and in order to pray there must be a broken spirit, a contrite heart. Prayer is the soul's cry of need, the first earnest sigh after deliverance. How, then, can any man pray while he still takes pleasure in his vain conversation? "That which is born of the flesh is flesh;" "but God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." The Samaritan

woman replies, "I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things." Wonderful experience! When once a soul is convinced of sin, when it turns itself towards prayer, a confused recollection of Jesus arises within that distressed soul! Jesus begins at length to be of some value. The light now shineth in darkness; hitherto the darkness received it not. The decisive hour has now struck when it is become possible for Jesus to manifest Himself; when there is admittance and room for that "faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus is come into the world to save sinners."

"I that speak unto thee am He!" Ah, when once this conviction has seized hold of the spirit, it will be the time of a new birth! No longer any condemnation, no longer any love of darkness—the scales fall from the eyes—the morning star rises in the heart. There is, then, something here below beyond Jacob's well! "Man doth not live by bread alone!" By the side of this life of vanity, of these joys that are so full of tears, there is a living good, an eternal reality, and Truth bears witness to itself: "I that speak unto thee am He!"

"And upon this came his disciples, and marvelled that he talked with the woman." Poor disciples, who did not as yet know Him who said, "Let there be light: and there was light!" While they are gone into the city to buy provisions, Jesus calls a soul from death to life. And is not this astonishment of theirs one we have too often experienced? We were far away, and when we come back we find a change in some person who was perhaps the very last in whom we should have ventured to hope for it. We come with our provisions, and the Lord can dispense with them; He is Himself "the living bread that came down from heaven." The disciples, we observe, were too delicate to question their Lord—to say to Him, "What seekest Thou, or why talkest Thou with her?" Let us be careful to imitate their reserve. It is very possible to offend and humble a soul with which the Lord is dealing, by making it the object of our curiosity. Let us rejoice over it in silence, but do not question it; let us pray that the process which is too sacred for display may be matured in stillness; the slower the growth, the deeper will the root strike.

We may well expect that the woman of Samaria, when once she has been able to say, "I know that my Redeemer liveth," will no longer remain what she was before. For if "grace be in us and abound, it makes us neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." This is the third stage of conversion. We are now about to see the Christian's walk and conversation begin.

We are told that the woman of Samaria left her water-pot, and that she went her way into the city, where she was to become an instrument of blessing to many. She left her water-pot; in other words, "what things were gain to her, these she counted loss for Christ." She forgot "the things that were behind, and pressed forward to those things that were before, for the mark of the prize of her high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Of all spectacles the most glorious is that of the transformation of a human soul. We admire the butterfly casting off its unsightly prisonhouse; but the sight most worthy of admiration is that of a converted heart throwing aside its former vain conversation. Then a new life begins to appear then old habits drop away; then the love of the

world gives way to affections set on things above; then, from the putting off of the old man, there comes forth one elect of God, holy, beloved.

What moments those are in which we witness this putting off, when we enjoy it in silence, when it is accomplished without any words, any exhortation of ours, when Christ alone speaks to the woman of Samaria, and she leaves her water-pot for the love of Christ! What are all the powers of this world in comparison to the might of that new affection! There is no longer any need to say, "You ought to deny yourselves." Self-denial is already learnt; it is a second nature rather than a duty. How should we not *decrease* gladly that Christ may *increase*—Christ, who is the hope of glory! What! has He humbled Himself even unto death, and shall sin still presume to live? shall we not crucify it in its affections and lusts? Had the Master no place where to lay His head, and shall the servant insist upon a life full of comfort and free from all cares? Christ endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself, and shall I not suffer myself to be opposed, crossed, frustrated, disappointed? He wore a crown of thorns; shall I, forsooth, walk on rose-leaves? Instead of the

joy set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame; and shall I refuse to yield, to renounce, shall I live still to myself? shall I not rather bring every thought into subjection to the obedience of faith? Yes! He is a King; to that end was He born; and ever since He has been lifted up, He *draws* hearts to Him as their sovereign Lord. The changed woman of Samaria is a living sermon; if men will not believe the gospel, let them believe at least in the effects it produces. They refuse it as a doctrine; well, then, let them behold it as a power to save all who believe.

The woman runs to the city of Sychar, and there acts as leaven to leaven the whole population. How much influence one single soul may possess over others, if only it belong in very deed to Christ! The Christian life has a transforming energy; it is God who speaks, acts, triumphs in man. The testimony borne by the woman is a very simple one: "Come, see a man who told me all that ever I did: is not this the Christ?" As He has changed me, so will He change you; only go to Him, and you will find this to be so. It is true, the great essential is to be able to say, "He has changed me." The messengers of the

Lord are those who are new creatures. Show me what you have left behind for Jesus, and I will believe you, but not before. What I need is a demonstration of spirit and of power, and the most convincing of all is renunciation and self-sacrifice.

The inhabitants of Sychar came, first, indeed, upon the authority of the woman; but a faith based on external authority will not suffice; individual experience is needed, and this Jesus bestows on all who come to Him. This is the will of God, that "whosoever believeth on the Son should have eternal life." And just as Jesus can quicken a single soul, He can quicken a whole population. He can make the dry bones live, and change a field of death into a garden of the Lord. "His meat is to do the will of Him who sent Him;" and the will of God is, that "every knee should bow, and every tongue should confess that there is none other name by which men may be saved." What joy to Jesus to see all these people on their way to Him! Many a one amongst them was still asleep; but when the rousing begins in one single soul, the fields, little by little, grow white to harvest. Oh! surely we ought to pray for more labourers for this harvest. The men of

Sychar came and saw; let us throw away our prejudices, go on till we reach Him, and we then shall know that Jesus is living still.

"So when the Samaritans were come unto him, they besought him that he would tarry with them: and he abode with them two days." Two days with Jesus! How much He might say to our souls if we were only to continue for two days in communion with Him! "The water that He would give us would be in us a well of water springing up into everlasting life." Two days of full experience may serve as a foundation for an entire life, and even these inhabitants of Sychar are able to say to their countrywoman, "Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world."

Have we then shared their experience? How far has Jesus penetrated into our life and conversation? Do not let us be content to stand mere lookers-on before this narrative, contenting ourselves with saying, "How full of interest and beauty it is!" Has our own conversion begun, and is it a real conversion? If we look over our past life, we will infallibly find there tokens of the

work of preparatory grace. There are so many circumstances in the most commonplace life which say to us from God, "Awake, thou that sleepest!" But the question relates to our own personal salvation. Have we heard and understood God's appeal, and are we on our way to Christ? We should look and see what the Lord has disclosed to us, what faults of character and conduct He has laid bare and censured in us. If we have learnt to know ourselves, we have also learnt to pray. Happy the worshippers "in spirit and in truth;" such a condition is never a stationary one. When once we have found the source of life, we shall inevitably leave many things behind. Examine ourselves, therefore, as to this point. If the Lord has indeed prepared us and called us, if He has awakened us, saying, "I that speak to thee am He," what character has our life assumed since then? Are things in general much the same with us to-day that they were last year? Alas! we are not converted if "old things have not passed away," if "all things have not become new." Let us "stir up the gift that is within us." Why should we shrink so timidly from "putting off the old man?" We ought to remember that he is

"corrupt according to the deceitful lusts." Would we then be corrupted, when we may be healed? seduced and enslaved, when we may be "more than conquerors?" Just as the Saviour entered into Sychar, even so is "salvation come to our house." There is a divine and all-powerful influence to be exerted in our favour springing from "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ." Let us give free scope to the action of this grace, both in our own hearts and in our home circles. It will communicate to us that "godliness which is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the present life and of that which is to come." Let our motto be, "All for Christ, nothing for me." To-day we will cry, to-morrow we will give thanks; to-day we will weep, to-morrow we will sing for joy. Of help of all kinds there is enough and to spare, and we have all help if only we have Jesus. Take all the sermons we have listened to, all the volumes we have read, assimilate them, transform them into our own life-blood,—the converted of the Lord are those who can truly say, "We believe not because of your words; *we have heard Him ourselves*, and know that He is in very truth the Christ, the Saviour of the world."

X.

THE HOUSE OF MERCY.

JOHN v. 2–9.

"Now there is at Jerusalem, by the sheep-market, a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great mu'titude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first, after the troubling of the water, stepped in, was made whole of whatsoever disease he had. And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years. When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole? The impotent man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me. Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath."

X.

WE have all doubtless often been in one of those popular places of resort where in summer weather all manner of invalids congregate, attracted by some spring of water which possesses a peculiar healing virtue, and is found to restore health and prolong life. When one walks in the midst of such an assembly of bathers, one meets with many different expressions of countenance among them,—some are pale, and bear the impress of dangerous disease; some are cheerful and convalescent, others sad and discouraged at not having yet experienced the good results hoped for. The fact is, that a patient may come again and again, and yet come to no purpose. The spring has no inherent healing power, an angel must descend and render it efficacious. Every one depends upon God's blessing on the means, as indeed "every good and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights." Many an invalid has to return

as he came, having feelingly learnt that it is not of him that willeth, or of him that runneth, but of God, who alone holds in His power life, and breath, and all things.

The pool of Bethesda was eminently one of these healing places of resort, a spot fraught with health and life-giving influence. It was surrounded by sufferers who all waited for the moving of the waters; for the important moment is that in which an angel descends and troubles the still reservoir, and the first sick person plunged therein, after that agitation of the water, will be cured, be his disease what it may. Our motto speaks to us in the first instance of men who were blind, halt, and withered; and after that sad catalogue of ills, we are told of a paralytic man who, after waiting for thirty-eight weary years, finds health restored to him beneath those same porticos, though in a different way. It was a meeting with Jesus Christ that wrought the cure in his case. Hitherto he had had no one to throw him in at the auspicious moment: the Saviour takes pity on him and restores him at once; and to recall to him his long period of helplessness and suffering, bids him carry the bed he had been lying on. The man obeys. The bed would prove a memorial,

as we shall see by and by, well adapted to maintain him in a state of due humility and thankfulness.

The scene of these occurrences is named in Hebrew Bethesda, which signifies *House of Mercy.* Do you ask what interest the narrative can have for us? First of all, let us pause at this touching appellation, *House of Mercy.* Can it be that this house is closed in this our day? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath He, in anger, shut up His tender mercies? If it be true that Christ "is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever," it must needs be that this house is still standing,—that it is still possible to find it. Is THERE, THEN, A BETHESDA FOR US? WHERE IS IT? AND WHAT TAKES PLACE THERE? Let us take this for the subject of our present meditation.

May not we call the Church of Christ a house of mercy? This Church, what else is it but a great hospital? The Lord of the Church came not for those who were whole, but for those who were sick. Every Christian is an invalid whose treatment the Saviour has taken in hand. His ministry is directed only to infirm and afflicted souls; He himself has said, "I am sent to heal the broken-

hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, to set at liberty them that are bound." The sufferers at Bethesda are grouped around a pool of water. Does not Jesus, too, speak of water, the "living water springing up into everlasting life?" The Psalmist in his day had experience of the "rivers of God that are full of water," and "make glad the city of God." Isaiah exclaims, "Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters;" and St Paul, in speaking of the Church, declares that Christ "loved it and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word." Elsewhere Christ says to His disciples, "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." The Holy Scripture, which is its own best interpreter, here tells us that we must seek for the pool of Bethesda. The washing of water is in the word. It is the word of God that regenerates, heals, sanctifies. Place yourself under its influence, and it will be "health to your bones." It is by its agency that the Lord heals our backslidings, that He puts off from us the old man which is corrupt, and puts on us the new man.

But to the written word must ever be joined

the influence of the Spirit. This is the angel who comes down into the pool to trouble the waters. If we place the Bible in the midst of a respectable, self-satisfied circle, it will remain a sealed book to them; but if we give it to some of those who know themselves to be blind, impotent, and withered, the Spirit of God by the word will have various and striking effects. It is in souls that travail and are heavy laden that the word becomes quick and powerful. It teaches one, convinces another, corrects a third, and instructs him in righteousness, "that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." The influence of the sacred Scriptures is a very complex one; the same passage may affect people, and even the same people, at different times, in many different ways. The wisdom of God is infinite in its manifestations; and nothing proves the divinity of the Bible so much as this variety of impressions, which are so many undulations of life. The decisive moment for the sick of Bethesda was that in which the angel's wing curled the surface of the pool, and the sufferers descended into it. We may in like manner say, that the turning points of a Chris-

tian's life are those in which the Spirit from above stirs the word of God within our hearts. If we yield to these internal suggestions, and allow them the authority they claim, "our peace shall be as a river, and our righteousness as the waves of the sea." On the other hand, if we do not follow the motions of the Spirit, our cure will not begin, and what does not amend will infallibly grow worse. Simeon, for having believed the promises, and "come by the Spirit" to the temple, found His Saviour there; Ananias and Sapphira, for having kept back the truth, were suddenly destroyed, and that without remedy. Nothing is so solemn as those moments when the word is about to take effect—when the Holy Spirit once more moves upon the face of the waters. We are never nearer to God than then; but, on the other hand, never more in danger from Satan. Bring therefore your thoughts into captivity, and resist the devil, and this will spare you many bitter tears.

Beneath the porches of Bethesda, besides all the other sufferers, there was a paralytic man, who had been afflicted thirty-eight years, and had never been able to meet with any one who would throw him into the water. There he lay, close to the

pool, and yet powerless to enter in. Does not his case remind us of that class of Christians, who are indeed very near the truth, but not as yet in the truth? There are often well-disposed persons who may remain thirty-eight years in the self-same state, without the shock, the change they need, ever coming to pass. The characteristic of such a Christianity is a state of languor resembling confirmed paralysis. Everything is believed, everything is admitted. Such are not far from the kingdom of God, but yet they have never actually met with Jesus Christ? All round them there are those who experimentally know the grace of God, who have been taught by His word. It is not the outward environment that is in fault, but the true life has not yet begun.

There are two classes of Christians who suffer from this state of languid inaction.

First, there are persons of weakly constitutions, in whom the physical condition tells upon the moral. The body is often a burden; and a burden makes those who carry it sigh and groan. These every-day sufferings depress the spirit and paralyse the inner springs of life. Much Christian strength is required by those who are the slaves of a suffer-

ing frame, in order to rejoice in hope, to be patient in tribulation, and to continue instant in prayer. Such strength is a rare treasure, and what we most often meet with is a worn-out spirit in a worn-out body. We pray, we cry, we feel somewhat better, but with the return of our pains, our depression returns, the Bible loses its influence, prayer is interrupted, and Christian communion is of no avail. One is readily reconciled to such a sufferer's lack of joy, to the small profit he seems to derive from his religion—one rather pities than blames him. That which alone can console those who suffer thus, is that they are in the "house of mercy." It is better to be in the Lord's hospital than to be drowned in the dangerous delights of the world. Who can say what they could have done with their physical energies if they had been at their own free disposal? Who knows what would have become of their souls if they had had no yoke to bear, or if this yoke had been early removed? Thirty-eight years at Bethesda are often thirty-eight years well spent. Such may not be healthy, active Christians, but they are Christians kept beneath the Lord's own hand. Their suffering is their safety. They could never have gone through life well on any

other plan. Happiness, such as they conceive of it, would have been their ruin. It is better that one member be lost, better even that health be lost, than with all our members, and in full strength, to be cast into hell.

This paralytic of Bethesda may also typify a different class. There are old people who formerly lived in the world, and only possessed that conventional amount of Christianity which is, generally speaking, to be found there. Later on in life conversions take place in their house, their children are won over to the gospel, and their burning desire is to bring their old father, their old mother, beneath its influence. But in spite of all their prayers, they perceive no change; they cannot plunge the aged frame into the waters of salvation. They do all they can to preach by their example, to move their loved paralytics with books, religious services, religious conversation, edifying acquaintances. A case like this shows us the difference between Christianity wrought by man's influence and that which is the work of the Lord. Barren in ourselves, we have no life to give; it belongs to Jesus Christ alone to say, "As the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the

Son to have life in himself." One thought alone can comfort those whose efforts are powerless over dear friends,—the thought that they too are in the "house of mercy;" that if they be loved by their earthly relatives, the Lord loves them infinitely more. He is more anxious even than they are to cure and to quicken them. Therefore, my soul, "wait thou still upon God." "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" "If it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, should it also be marvellous in my eyes? saith the Lord of hosts." All the world would have given up the poor, powerless sufferer at Bethesda; but Jesus Christ gives up, abandons no one. If He lay His hand heavily on some for long years, it is only that He may reveal Himself to them, and cause them to know the salvation of the Lord. At the appointed hour He approaches the paralytic, and asks of him, "Wilt thou be made whole?" The Saviour can stir up the depths of our spirits, and make us yearn for a change of state and nature. These long periods of depression may have a blessed ending, and at length we see a result of the thirty-eight seemingly wasted years. A soul is often more near to Christ than it appears to us. We

would fain see proofs of life, but it does not follow that the tree is dead because the fruit is long in showing. There are more patients at Bethesda than we are aware of. That state in which a soul knows not how to express its wants may appear to us stationary and unpromising, and yet Jesus Christ may have already approached; and the hour may be coming when He shall put the momentous question, "Wilt thou be made whole?"

The impotent man replies, "Sir, I have no man when the water is troubled to put me into the pool; but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me." One very frequent cause of our feeble and sickly condition is, that we expect too much from the creature. We seek the support of the arm of flesh, and we do not cry to the Lord himself. It is spiritual indolence that prolongs our paralysis. It is possible, too, that over-much solicitude on the part of others, instead of producing health, produces impotence. We have often some soul beside us that we would fain quicken; and in order to make the matter easier, we provide it with a ready-made Christianity. We prompt its prayers, we place the Bible before it; but in feeding and tending it thus, it is possible that we may be

rendering it incapable of self-exertion. Instead of shortening the thirty-eight years of torture, we may prolong them. It was not for nothing that the man at Bethesda was not permitted to find any one to throw him into the pool. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put any confidence in man. Men may indeed indoctrinate us; it is Christ alone that can give us life.

We see how it fares with the sufferer when once Jesus Christ has personally visited him; the Lord bids him "take up his bed and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed and walked."

This long season of debility is then susceptible of a happy close. When we have left off hoping for a change, the Lord comes, and can at once cure us. They who have for thirty-eight years prayed for some soul that is dear to them, and which does not shake off its deathlike lethargy, ought never to doubt that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Before they consign that aged frame to the grave, they will yet see a miracle wrought. It is not always a rapturous joy that succeeds to a long paralysis; but on looking upon our paralytic when his hour of departure is come, we

may see from more signs than one that the Lord hath spoken to him. Salvation does not depend upon the joy of salvation, but the Lord gives grace and glory when He fulfils the promise, "He shall know in that day that it is I that have said, Here am I."

The man after he is cured is to take up his bed; it is a memorial that will remind him of his past condition.

The converted of the Lord are not perfected saints. Always mistrust those conversions where everything goes smoothly, where there is no root of bitterness left to trouble. St Paul had his thorn, and every true Christian will have his too. This bed that the restored paralytic is to take up is a memento of his wretchedness, which will prevent him from being puffed up and unduly exalted. Such are our own relapses into weakness and sadness, when we need to be again humbled and brought low. There are sins the consequences of which may extend very far into Christian life. The tendencies of old are not extinct, but still they are no longer the dominant tendencies. They may revive from time to time when our lamp has need of oil; and these conflicts with our own nature, these

"cries out of the depths," always testify to a work of the Spirit within us, and always leave a blessing behind them.

But let us never forget, when these occasions of humiliation occur, that there is a house of mercy. We leave it, we may return to it. We have received strength to plunge into the healing waters. The Word of God is ours, with all its powers and all its promises, and it "worketh effectually in them that believe." The Scripture cannot be broken, and its language is, "He will again have compassion upon you"—again to-day—again to-morrow; the Lord's limit is eternity. He is good, and "His mercy endureth for ever." The Lord shall comfort Zion; the afflicted of His people will take refuge there. "They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them. I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way wherein they shall not stumble." And hath God said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good? As a swimmer delights to float, to plunge, to bathe himself again and again in the wave that supports him, so should the sick of Bethesda in those pools that are full of water. Let them lay hold with confidence upon

the proffered means of grace, and the angel will descend anew into those inexhaustible depths, and will trouble the water. The heart of Jesus is a house of mercy; and as surely as there are divine promises, so are they in Him yea, and in Him amen, that God may be glorified by us. "Of His fulness have we all received, and grace for grace," and are we to be the only ones who draw water without joy from the wells of salvation? One experience of God's grace is the preparation for another. The heart expands,—the more it receives, the bolder its faith. He who turns the hearts of men has not forgotten us; He will pour out His Spirit upon us, and make us to understand His word, "that thou mayest remember and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God."

XI.

CHRIST IN THE FAMILY.

JOHN ii. 1-11.

"And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there. And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage. And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come. His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it. And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece. Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it. When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was, (but the servants which drew the water knew,) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, and saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now. This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him."

XI.

IT is a very sweet and precious thing to live happily one with another, but it is a far sweeter thing still to live happily with the Lord. Nay, it is with this that we must begin. Would we give a truly solid character to our domestic happiness? Then we must first of all establish solid relations between ourselves and the Saviour; for "other foundation can no man lay," and "without Him we can do nothing,"—not even love each other,—"for in Him we live." It is true that to many people Jesus Christ is nothing more than one who preaches sermons, and heals the sick, and who in any other character seems out of place. Persons of this way of thinking look upon piety as a thing apart, having its own proper times and seasons. They know not that "godliness is profitable for all things, having the promise of this life and of that which is to come." Would we discover whether we know the true Christ? Then we must ask our-

selves whether He has prevailed over our ruling affections; for He "must," as He said to Zaccheus, "abide at our house." We must "eat and drink with Him;" in small matters, as in great, ours must be a Christian spirit. But this never can be the case, if the Saviour in our eyes be not "the chiefest of ten thousand,"—if we give Him not precedence over everything else, not in outward and Pharisaic fashion, but so as to make us happy and free in our Christian life. It is for this that He comes to us; and the marriage in Cana, upon which we are about to meditate, exemplifies the family training that Jesus Christ carries on. All those who live together under the same roof pass through the Lord's hands. He places each in positions that "bring to light the hidden things of darkness;" and hence it is absolutely necessary to be converted, not partially, but thoroughly and sincerely. Let us take a survey of this friendly circle in Cana; we shall see in what manner the Lord "manifests forth His glory" in domestic life, in order that His disciples may believe in Him.

This table, around which we see the invited guests assemble, is it not an image of the bond

which should connect all those who live together, or who constantly meet under one roof? This common table, and on it common bread and wine, do they not all remind us that we are "members of one body" and sharers of one hope? This table exhorts us to the "unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace;" after that, whether we be rich or poor matters very little, for "godliness with contentment is great gain," and "better is little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble therewith." But a perfect domestic harmony is a very rare thing, and requires that the Lord should come to us in many various ways to make us what He would have us be. Let us observe His dealings in the home we have now before us.

Our narrative relates to a marriage, an occasion on which, among worldly people, wine flows in abundance, joy sparkles round, and there is no room left for anxious cares. But it is not in one of these loudly hilarious scenes that we find Jesus Christ; the couple of Cana in Galilee were, we doubt not, a pious couple, only there are different kinds of piety. It is not to be supposed that the young pair, before they have passed through fire and water together, can be thoroughly grounded

and settled in the knowledge and love of the Lord. There are religious homes where the gospel is indeed honoured, but where a real conversion has not as yet taken place. The bridegroom and the bride have been well educated, well instructed; they have good religious principles, the fear of God, and all manner of amiable qualities; and in marrying they throw all these into a common fund, and believe that with this double portion they have a double security of happiness. They trust to themselves; they do not yet trust to the Lord. What happens next? "The wine runs short." All manner of difficulties supervene, some material, some spiritual, which their own strength and resources prove insufficient to meet.

There is one fund of wealth which soon becomes exhausted, and that is our natural feelings. When we enter under one roof we desire to make ourselves mutually happy, we are animated with the noblest and most fervent aspirations; but we do not yet know what lies concealed beneath the sentiments of our heart. This mutual devotion is but mutual egotism. These new relations are not as yet sanctified. Each is seeking his own satisfaction, and calling that impulse love. Each

desires to appropriate to himself personal happiness from this union; but true love is not self-indulgence, it is rather the crucifixion of self. If we love selfishly, we may be sure we will have terrible disappointments. Our golden cup will soon be empty, the marriage wine will fail. Illusion will give place to reality; we were only captivated with the poetry of the thing, we had not as yet discovered our own nature. The fire of feeling burns out, the besetting faults begin to make themselves felt; let vexations and contradictions arise, the true character will appear. When the self-will of each clashes with that of the other, when the susceptibilities of self-love are wounded, when ill-humour is stirred or the passions roused, the marriage wine runs dry; and what is true of our natural feelings is true of natural religion as well.

For there is, as we have before hinted, a certain family religion which is often a mere traditional affair. It has been inherited like some old piece of furniture that we would on no account part with, although in point of fact this family relic is of very little use. True religion, on the other hand, is the power of God. We are only pious when we are stronger than ourselves, and there will soon come

some touchstone which will show us the extent of our own piety. In every home there are seasons when nothing less is needed than to "put on bowels of mercy, goodness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering." We thought indeed we had them all, but now that they are required in action, what is it we find? "Anger, wrath, malice." We disguise all these beneath as Christian a semblance as we can, but we do not the less suffer from them, and there is no more wine at the wedding.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, remarks the distress of the young couple, and, full of kindly solicitude on their account, says to her Son, "They have no wine." But Jesus answers her, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come." Mary trenches here upon her Son's domain; she would have Him hasten to work a miracle, but Jesus "will not give His glory to another." He himself is the Great Counsellor. The answer our Lord returns to His mother is the same that He makes to every over-anxious and precipitate spirit. "What have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come." There is sure to be some one member at least in every family with whom Jesus Christ

has to deal thus. Impatience gets hold of us unawares, and in impatience there is always some trace of a love of power. The woman as well as the man is often a despot in this form. This despotism disguises itself under the form of advice often bestowed, of a pleasure in lecturing and exhorting, of a display of wisdom which is often nothing but a disguised sense of superiority. Characters such as these need slight humiliations and periods of expectation and suspense. When the brethren of Jesus say to Him, "Depart hence, and go into Judea, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest," He replies to them in the same tone as to His mother, "My time is not yet come, but your time is alway ready." Such lessons as these are a great gain; they are a work carried on by God in our souls and intended to make us feel that "with the lowly is wisdom," that "before honour is humility," that "he that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city." But, as St James says, "let patience have her perfect work." We often repress for a time countless movements of impatience, but suddenly they break out all at once like the explosion of a heavy thunder cloud. Then we have to begin our Christian task all over again,

for "he that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down and without walls." Mary, the mother of Jesus, understands the lesson taught her, and meekly observes to the servants, "Whatsoever He saith to you do it."

There is nothing so happy as to know how to bend our own will to the will of the Lord. We bring upon ourselves torment after torment so long as we have not learned to refrain our soul and keep it low, "even as a child that is weaned from its mother." On the other hand, blessed are those that are "taught of God." The fairest of all ornaments is that of a "meek and quiet spirit;" even in the sight of God this is "of great price." Gentleness is the great subduer, when it springs from a heart that is humble and submissive and contented to wait the Lord's pleasure without presuming to dictate times and seasons to Him. Then it is that the time of Jesus comes, the hour when He will repeat His Cana miracle.

There were by the side of the wedding-table six of those great stone-vessels used for the ablutions of the Jews, and Jesus saith unto the ser-

vants, "Fill the water-pots with water," and they filled them to the brim.

Let us especially notice these six large empty vessels standing near the table whereon the wedding feast is laid. Do they not seem to tell us that by the side of our marriage joys and our most tender affections there still and ever remains a great void that Jesus has reserved for Himself alone? Earth is always earth. The sick man, though riches increases, cannot live by them. We may say the same of our affections. The servants, as we see, are made instrumental by the Lord. It is they who are appointed to fill the water-pots, and who, without being the least aware of it, are to become the secondary agents in a miracle.

A poor domestic, a little maid of whom no one takes any notice, may become a blessed leaven, leavening a whole household. Let us recall Abraham's steward and the Israelitish slave of Naaman's wife. "The last shall be first, and the first last." The great duty of a servant is to be faithful in small things, to say to himself, "Whatsoever I do I will do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto

men." This is the way to avoid "eye-service, as men-pleasers," and to act "as the servant of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart." It is only water, mere water, that the Lord tells the servants to pour; nevertheless this water when poured into other vessels will change into wine.

This is a miracle we see constantly repeated. Jesus Christ can change an inferior into a superior thing, if only we be animated by a spirit of filial obedience. Some possession that we did not appreciate, some position that seemed to us very poor, very unpromising, change their character completely when we look upon them as coming from the Lord, and take advantage of them for His service. "Draw out now," says Jesus to the servants who have obeyed His injunctions. Oh, let all who have brought their thoughts into captivity to the obedience of the word of the Lord, "taste and see that He is gracious!" "Every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it be received with thanksgiving." Only let us be faithful, and "instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree, and instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle-tree, and it shall be unto the

Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off."

In this miracle of the water changed into wine there is a lesson taught to many Christians. There are a number of men who take no plea sure in their vocation. The fact is, they do not know how to take advantage of it; they work in a mercenary spirit, and such a spirit disgusts one of anything. But instead of looking for the fault in themselves, these men are always blaming their position in life. Could they but find a better opening, a more dignified calling, more edifying environment, all would be changed, they say. On the contrary, we would tell them that they will change their circumstances so soon as they themseves become changed men. If they probe the heart of their lives, they will find that it is not a new vocation that they lack, but a new spirit. The commonplace becomes full of interest, the water turns to wine, so soon as we give heart and hands to the Saviour. He who saves us from condemnation can save us from discontent and weariness too. Let us look upon those things which hitherto we have only considered in reference to ourselves,

as having reference to Him. Everything becomes transformed in its nature when we accept of it as a favour instead of grumbling at it as a burden. "God is love." Whatever He does and whatever He assigns us, let us "be filled with the knowledge of His will, and walk worthy of Him unto all pleasing." We will see that we will be "strengthened with all might according to His glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering, with joyfulness." "Let every one abide in the same calling wherein he was called." We ought to look upon ourselves as the Lord's stewards, for "we are not our own, we are bought with a price;" and the only thing that the Lord requires of His stewards is "that they should be found faithful."

But at the marriage of Cana there is still another character who deserves our attention; it is the "governor of the feast."

The governor of the feast tastes "the water that had been made wine," and at once explains the miracle to himself in a natural manner. He believes that the bridegroom has done this to surprise the guests; he does not attribute the event to the

Lord; he is one of those who stop short at second causes.

Is there not indeed in most houses some one who resembles this ruler of the feast? We allude to a man who has Jesus at his side, and yet does not discern Him. Many things occur in family life which are plainly directions from the Lord, indications of His will, or miracles of His grace. But the "natural man perceiveth not the things of the Spirit of God;" that which veils them from his eyes being his own philosophy, falsely so called. All that he observes he explains by the laws of nature, the force of events, by physics or chemistry; he sees everything but Jesus. The servants, because they are more simple, are more clear-sighted than the ruler of the feast. They knew to whom to attribute this wine. We ought to be very happy when we are able to discern and to exclaim, as did St John upon another occasion, "It is the Lord." We have not the true Christ unless we can see Him in all things: "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths."

Nevertheless the ruler of the feast, blind as he was, made an observation that is perfectly true if we apply it to Jesus.

"Every man," saith he to the bridegroom, "at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now."

The world at the beginning does indeed set forth good wine,—it seduces us by fair appearances; but these are deceitful, and "the world passeth away, and the lusts thereof." It is not so with the wine of Jesus, nor with His method of dealing with us. Jesus, the bridegroom of our souls, waits till we have well drunk; then when He sees that we are satiated with the world, and that our soul "loatheth that light bread," He presents us with something better. This is the grace which never fails, and which is better than life. Then we shall leave to the world the things that belong to the world, and turning to the Lord we shall say, "Who is like unto thee? How excellent is thy loving-kindness! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings. We shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make us drink of the river of thy pleasures."

It is said at the close of the narrative, "This

beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory, and his disciples believed in him."

The disciples had been spectators of this miracle, the Lord having had their training in view. He leads them into a stranger's house, and it is there that He "manifests forth His glory." It is not always at church that we are nearest the Lord—during public worship we are too often absent-minded; but the Lord has other places of edification. These are the homes where grace has wrought miracles. We see a worldly family-circle where perhaps there is a strong prejudice against the gospel; but if we come back in a little time we will find that the Lord has manifested forth His glory there. Another spirit now breathes beneath that roof; "old things have passed away, behold, all things have become new." The members of that household have found out that Christ, the Saviour of humanity, is also the happiness of family life. The result of this is, that His disciples believe on Him. There are some whom we cannot convince by opening the Bible; but let us open to them the door of a Christian home, and they will believe. Let us lead them into a family where the water has become wine,

where spiritual education has been going on, and they will know the power of truth. The most incredulous will exclaim, "Surely the Lord was in this place, and I knew it not! How awful is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

We have now made the round of the persons assembled beneath the roof of this house in Cana, and we have noticed the work of the Lord carried on with regard to each one of them. Such an assemblage, we may be very sure, is never an affair of chance. The Lord chooses us the one for the other, educates us the one by the other. Let us only set out with Him, and we shall find the truth of this. Let us begin by knowing Himself; for what is the end of life, and why is it that God has created man? It is "that they might seek after the Lord, if haply they might feel after him and find him, though he be not far from every one of us." Have we attained to this? If so, we will see other souls by our side to whom we may be a blessing.

We will no longer be individuals only, we will be members, making parts of a body,—lively stones

built up in a spiritual house,—branches which with other branches spring forth from the vine. Selfishness divides; the love of Christ unites, for it is the bond of perfectness. We will see how we have been trained one for the other when once we have in the first instance offered our bodies as living sacrifices to Christ. We, the dwellers beneath the same roof, shall meet hereafter at the same tribunal. Nothing will then be so bitter as to find that we were hindrances to each other, nothing so sweet as to discover that we have been fellow-workers with God unto each other's salvation.

There was at this marriage of Cana one guest who never fails. Veiled at first, he will disclose himself by and by. That guest is Death. We had not invited him, but he ever comes self-invited, and in silence counts the heads assembled round the feast. If we come back a little later, one of the seats will be empty. Family life grows impoverished and bare. As autumn sweeps away the leaves, so death carries us away from each other. One guest alone remains—the Lord. He is faithful, He is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." The cruel void that death hollows out in

the heart of a family is another vessel that Jesus Christ wills to fill. He will not leave us orphans, He will come to us. His departure was but in order that His joy "might remain in us, and that our joy might be full." The saddest day, when His grace is sufficient for us, is a marriage-day still. Around us, mourning; within us, life-immortal! Outside, the dust of the tomb; within, Christ the hope of glory! Each new bereavement is a new approach to the heavenly inheritance. Happy friends of Cana! it is for eternity that you have been trained; it is that you may all meet again, that you have one after the other been called away from earth. To this earthly tabernacle, this meat that perisheth, shall succeed a building of God, a marriage-supper, which is that of the Lamb. Our earthly training over, our heavenly education begins. A sun that shall never set, wine that shall never fail, await us in the city of God, when faith shall have given place to sight, and "the sufferings of the present time to a far more exceeding weight of glory."

XII.

THE PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE OF THE CROSS.

REVELATION vii. 13–17.

"And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

XII.

ST JOHN, exiled by the Emperor Domitian to the rocky desert of Patmos, beholds in a series of visions the future destinies of the Church of Christ. We have the description of one of these visions in the seventh chapter of the Apocalypse. The eternal world opens to the eyes of the beloved disciple: he sees "a multitude, which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stand before the throne of God." They are all "clothed with white robes," which is an emblem of celestial glory; they have all also "palms in their hands," which denotes this multitude an army of conquerors.

Recently arrived, and finding themselves triumphant at the close of the battle they have been waging, they pour forth a song of praise, which strikes upon the ears of the listening and adoring disciple. His heart longs to know of whom this blessed army is composed, and a celes-

tial voice, as if anticipating his wish, asks him, "What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?" And as the humble servant of God, his forehead in the dust, replies, "Sir, thou knowest," the same voice goes on to solve the mystery, "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." The past that they have left behind was a *warfare*, the future that lies before them is *everlasting joy*. Once they wandered far from their God, groaning in themselves beneath a body of death; now "they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple." Once they walked in "a dry land, seeking water and there was none, and their tongue failed for thirst;" henceforth they shall dwell at ease, for "the Lamb shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

Is this a dream, we ask, or a reality? This rapturous vision of St John in a desert island, has it any meaning and any value for men in our day? Can such a future of glory be reserved for us also? If we take our stand before the cross of Jesus

Christ, it gives the explanation of all mysteries; the future unrolled before the eyes of the beloved disciple is the future of every contrite heart that can say, "I believe." The cross of Jesus is the centre of our rest, the centre of the history of the world, the centre of our eternity. Take away that cross, you know neither where you are nor whither you are going; replace it, all becomes light—behind you, within you, before you. The passage shows us what the practical experience of this cross is. We have three points to meditate upon:—the great tribulation,—the blood that cleanses,—and the white robes. If we combine these three, we have before us our eternal redemption.

In order to attain the palms of victory, it is necessary to pass through great tribulation. Where is this tribulation? It is to be found in three places.

First of all, around us. If for one single day we could look down from the skies upon the earth, what is it that we would see there? A great tribulation. What changes here below, what agitations, look on what side we will! Nothing stable, no abiding city; we fly away, as Scripture says. Our

best estate is but labour and sorrow, the bread we eat is bread of affliction. There is a something that continually weighs upon us, a care, an anxiety; the order of things is felt not to be their normal order. And this is true of all things, of all creation. "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now." These lives that fall around, this life that grows pale, this subjection to vanity, these plaintive voices that from all directions strike upon our ears,—all tell us that we are living in a fallen world, and that what we call life is in point of fact nothing but a great tribulation.

But these generalities become merely secondary if we look within. For this great tribulation is there also, it is not around us only. Let us search into the very heart of our personal life, believe it or believe it not, there is no healing of our bruise. Some terrible catastrophe has perverted our whole nature. That which should govern there is taken captive, that which should serve sways. If we look at our general condition, we find that "our iniquities have separated between us and our God." The bond of peace is broken, and what is left when peace has fled! A great tribulation, an empty heart,

a withered spirit, a gnawing conscience,—"lusts that war against the soul." If we take "the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea," one stern fact will follow us there—and that fact is sin. Ah, this is not a word like other words,—this word is a reality, and this reality is a hell. Whether it begin to burn already or not, it will too surely burn. Oh! let us make our peace with God, let us judge our own selves. When the whole head is sick, when the whole heart is faint, it is madness to go on saying, "Peace, peace," seeing there is no peace.

But the great tribulation is to be found elsewhere too—found on the cross of Jesus Christ. If we suffer for our sins, we suffer for ours only; but the great Victim of Calvary was made a "curse for the whole world." "The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquities of us all." Let us count if we can the infinity of sins committed by Adam's posterity, and then reflect, if one sin adequately realised be a curse already, what a fearful judgment must their whole weight have entailed upon the Representative of sinners! And this cup was one He could not put away, for He willed to be the "propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the

sins of the whole world." Ah, could we but penetrate into that mysterious night in the garden of Gethsemane, into that agony during which the world slept, while He watched and wrestled,—could we but enter into that strong crying and tears, into those prayers and supplications, up to that last cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" we should recognise a tribulation for which human language has no words. God alone could fathom those depths. All that we know is that the Mediator of our souls was subject to agony and condemnation, that the unseen accuser omitted no iota of our debt of guilt when exacting its payment in full from our Surety. Did not Jesus himself say, "It is finished?" All our salvation is the fruit of a great tribulation. O my soul, follow thou the Lamb of God, "who taketh away the sins of the world," and thou wilt know this—thou wilt appreciate the worth of that blood in which the heavenly multitude had washed their robes and made them white.

This is the second point we have to consider.

The Scripture is express in its statements concerning Christ: that "we have redemption

through His blood"—that is to say, "the remission of sins;" that "without shedding of blood there is no remission;" that "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin"—not His doctrine, not His example, but *His blood.* The Saviour himself, when instituting the Holy Supper, says, "This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you." The expiation is in that blood shed. Placed in anything else, it is expiation no longer. It is the blood that is the seat of natural life; and it is in the heart of natural life that we find the seat of sin. Now, sin had to be struck at in its very root in order that the satisfaction required by the conscience should be genuine. It was necessary that that blood—that is, that internal life which had become enmity against God—should be voluntarily shed upon the altar, in order that the primeval harmony between the creature and the Creator should be restored. But this life which had to sacrifice itself could not be the representative of another life so long as the victim was only a man; God alone was able to reconcile the world unto Himself, but God made man, God-man, the one Mediator between Heaven and earth, and it is thus that Christ

offers Himself to us on the cross. "By his one oblation he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." That which the savage dimly guessed at, that which the Old Testament presents only as a shadow, the vague presentiment of all nations, is confirmed in the one Divine Victim. The foundation of our peace is in that "mystery of godliness, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and committing to us the word of reconciliation." The gospel is tidings of pardon, it directs our gaze to Him whom we have pierced, for whosoever looks to and believeth in the Son hath eternal life. Let us go, then, to that fountain open for sin and for uncleanness, and that in you which is red as crimson shall be white as wool. He himself hath said to every weary and heavy-laden soul—He who cannot lie: "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee." Well then may we exclaim with the prophet, "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.

He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us, he will subdue our iniquities: and thou wilt cast all our sins into the depths of the sea."

But who are they who are capable of appropriating this salvation? We are indeed in presence of "the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than that of Abel;" but have we washed our robes therein? have we made them white?

Let us examine this third point—the most important to us of all:—

Evidently we must here seriously ask ourselves—What have I been doing hitherto with my sins? It is only a poor sinner whom the blood of Jesus Christ can effectually wash. Have I then cast aside my own righteousness? Our garments are the covering of our whole body; and it is with our whole personality that we have now to do, with our ruling principle and temper. That which has perverted our life has been self-seeking. If, then, Jesus Christ is to save us, we must be converted to Him. Let us put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and yield ourselves unreservedly to His rule; He is the Author of eternal salvation indeed, but only to such as obey Him. Do we belong

to Jesus Christ? There is an infallible sign by which we may discover whether we do or not: it is a broken heart. Now, are our hearts broken? One man, perhaps, does not think about his sins at all; daily routine, anxiety about material things, makes up the whole of his life; he neither knows nor cares for anything beyond. Another pardons himself, makes himself white by his own endeavours; the blood of the Lamb is thrown away upon him. A third is a respectable character, well wrapped up with general consideration; no use to discuss the matter with him; grace will never reach him beneath that panoply. A fourth may indeed have received certain warnings; he feels conscious that all is not as it should be with him, but worldly dissipation stifles all such suggestions. At length we come to one upon whom God's chastening hand has long rested; we expect much from one so severely tried; but no—we find that the heart may be as much deadened by misfortune as by the common course of daily life. Although we go from house to house, and take, like Diogenes, a lantern to aid our search, the rarest thing of all to find will be a poor sinner. It is not that Jesus Christ is unknown to all those individuals, those families; but what they

repudiate is the Jesus who washes, cleanses; what they above all dread is the obligation to repent, to be converted. Nevertheless, Jesus Christ has said, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." He demands something more than a mere conventional orthodoxy — He demands "a new creature." The true Christ is one who will "see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied." He requires love for love, a crucified sinner for a crucified Saviour. Oh, what changes begin to take place when once His voice is really heard! There is a work that is carried on in secret, and that proceeds from the cross of Christ. The false foundations are shaken, the rebel will surrenders itself, the heart feels the power of a new affection. It is no longer a mere temporary mood, that comes and goes; it is a being transformed by the renewing of the mind, a *spiritual life* in the place of *natural life;* and this change is one that will grow more and more unto perfection. "When I shall be lifted up," says Christ, "I will draw all men unto me." The attraction of the cross is of all attractions the strongest. God has many powers, but His sovereign power of all is Jesus Christ. What was it that made St Paul so strong? how was he

so sustained in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in watchings, in fastings? Because he was determined to know nothing else but Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. Upon that cross the body of sin is destroyed; the partition wall is done away; there is boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way. All those who are "come out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb," are conquerors. The joy of salvation is their strength; it is no longer they who live, it is their conquering Lord who lives in them.

And the cross, moreover, is the banner that unites all nations and all ages. There are many varieties amongst men, but the blood that washes all alike is also a mighty influence that unites us all. "You who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ." "Lift up your eyes round about. Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?" They are poor sinners coming from the east and the west, from the north and from the south; they have understood, have responded to the appeal, "Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." Beneath the standard of the cross all differences of

race are done away with, all ages are as one; there is "no more Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ is all, and in all."

But there still remain souls unsaved. They feel the want of pardon, of peace, of a happiness that shall supply all their needs, and be eternal even as God. Well, then, they may have all these, and what is more, they may have them without money and without price. Let them contemplate closely their great tribulation; realise the extent of their sorrow; see how their whole nature is soiled and stained. It is that old garment which is the radical cause of all their woe. Why should they keep it any longer, since there is a better one provided for them? There is an old Adam, but there is also the Second Adam; if they cast off the former, they shall put the latter on.

Life is wearing on, wearing away. Soon the hour will come which is to be to us the last on earth. A great cloud of witnesses will assemble round our dying bed; their voices will inquire, "Who is this that cometh out of great tribulation?" Oh that God may give us the blessed answer, "It is one of those who have washed

their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. He shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on him, nor any heat. For his Redeemer shall feed him, and shall lead him unto living fountains of water; and God shall wipe away all tears from his eyes."

The mind reels as it contemplates this glory to be revealed. To arrive as a culprit, and to be received as a child! To have nothing but stains to bring, and to see one's self washed, made white, conformed to the image of God's dear Son! To leave behind us a tribulation of every day, every hour, and have before us palms and everlasting gladness! Can this be indeed true, indeed real? Ah, if we doubt it, let us look at the cross; "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." To all our doubts, present and future, let us oppose the blessed assurance, "He hath loved us with an everlasting love." Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, the miracle of miracles is the salvation of a sinner—is mine!

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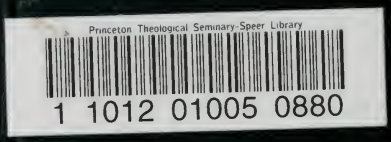
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